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S E R M O N S

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS,

V I Z.

The great rule of equity
explained and recommend-
ed.

Of the causes of mens incon-
stancy in religion, — with
remedies for it, — and in-
stances of it in good men.

JESUS the holy and anointed
of GOD.

The providence of GOD
vindicated in permitting
the sufferings of CHRIST.

The sufferings of CHRIST
no just objection against
the divinity of his mission.

The nature of religious joy.

Rejoicing in the LORD the
privilege and duty of the
righteous.

Of walking worthy of GOD.

The duty of praise and
thanksgiving.

On occasion of the death of
a young lady.

By the late Rev. Mr. HENRY GROVE,
of TAUNTON.

Published from the Author's MANUSCRIPT.

V O L. III.

L O N D O N,

Printed by JOHN WILSON, at the
Turk's-Head in Gracechurch-street.

MDCCXL.

SERMONS

ON THE Following SUBJECTS

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The lastings of Christ	The great rule of equity
no just objection against	explained and recommended
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The nature of religious joy.	Of the causes of mental in-
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By the Rev. J. WILSON, of GROVE.

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M D C C X L.



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glory.*

SER M.

SER-



S E R M O N I.

The great Rule of Equity explained
and recommended.

MAT. vii. 12.

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye
would that men should do to
you, do ye even so to them: for
this is the law and the prophets.*



FROM what men are ready to
do for their fellow-creatures, we
may sometimes very justly rea-
son concerning what we may
expect from God; and so from
the manner of God's dealing with us, how we
ought to act *one towards another*. Of the for-
mer we have an instance in the 9th 10th and
11th verses of this chapter; where our blessed
Lord, as a most powerful motive to *prayer*,
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and a very great encouragement to hope in the mercy of God when we pray to him, argues from the similitude of an earthly parent, whose love and compassion to his children are such, that he is pleased to have them come with their desires to him; and will not knowingly withhold what is good and convenient for them, or give them any thing hurtful. And it is but reasonable to think, that he who put this affection for their offspring into the hearts of parents, is not without a tender concern for the welfare of mankind; who are *all* in some sense, especially the good and the pious, his children, and are therefore invited to come to him as to their *Father in heaven*. But no words will express this so well as our Saviour's own; *What man is there of you, who if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is heaven, give good things to them that ask him?* The worst of men upon other accounts, are seldom without this *natural affection* to their children, which in good men is excited, improved, and directed by a sense of duty. But as the best and most perfect among men, have some evil and imperfection cleaving to them, being subject to mistakes and passions, no child

SER. I. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 3

can have that absolute confidence in the kindness and care of the most indulgent father, (were his power as large as his will) which we may all have in the goodness and love of our heavenly Father; if we bring our requests to him, and do those things which are reasonable in themselves, and acceptable in his sight. Then follow the words of the text; *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.* In the former verses he reasons from *men* to *God*, here from *God* to *men*: the connexion and meaning of which words are clearly and shortly expressed in the paraphrase of an excellent * divine upon them; which I shall therefore take the liberty to repeat. “ Now if God thus deals with
 “ mankind, as to give them whatever they
 “ could reasonably expect from a most kind
 “ and loving father; then ought ye also so
 “ to deal with one another, as that every
 “ one be willing to do that always to another, which he can in reason expect another should do to him. This is that great
 “ rule, wherein is contained our whole duty
 “ towards our neighbour; this is the sum
 “ of righteousness and equity; this is what
 “ nature and the reason of things teach us;
 “ and this is what all God’s revelations to
 B 2 “ mankind,

* Dr. Clarke.

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“ mankind, in the law and the prophets,
“ tend ultimately to establish.”

IN farther discoursing of these words,

I. I SHALL endeavour to *state* and *explain* the *sense* of the *rule* here given by our Saviour, for our dealings with, and behaviour towards one another.

II. I SHALL *apply* this rule to *particular instances*, for the fuller illustration of it, and that it may be the more useful to us, in the course of our practice. And then,

III. I SHALL show the *great reasonableness* and *singular excellency* of it, particularly in this; that it is the *sum* of all which *the law and the prophets* deliver concerning our duty to our fellow-creatures.

I. I AM to *state* and *explain* the *import* of the *rule* here given by our Saviour, for our dealing with, and behaviour towards one another. The expression is very general and comprehensive, *all things whatsoever ye would men should do to you, &c.* but I believe you are all sensible it is to be understood with some limitations: I shall therefore explain it in some particulars.

I. *MERE* will and *expectation* is not, in these words of our Saviour, proposed as the rule and measure of *social duty*. The thing you are to consider, and by which you

SER. I. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 5

you are to guide your actions, is not barely what you *do* or what you *should desire* from another in any supposed circumstances; for there are *unreasonable* desires and expectations as well as *reasonable*. And indeed our desires are too commonly so, for us safely to follow them, either with regard to ourselves or to others. The first and immediate spring of our desires, is the bodily part in every man; this has a variety of wants and cravings, some natural, others contracted, some innocent, others vicious; and too often men are willing to have them gratified in whatever way it be done. This puts them upon doing unjustifiable things *themselves*, and makes them expect that *others* should do the like for them. When therefore another desires any thing of me, and I am sensible that my desires would naturally run in the same course, if I was in his case; must I presently do what he desires of me, without examining the nature of the thing? by no means. This is such a rule, as if followed, would occasion the greatest confusion and disorder, making that to be our duty which is not; nay, is perhaps sinful; or that to be sinful, which is our duty. A poor man would be glad to receive more in the way of charity, than it is usual for the most generous man to give. One who has been guilty of a fault, and has repeated that fault

again and again, would not be reprov'd, or would willingly go unpunish'd ; now must we for no better reason than this, give beyond our ability ; and without distinguishing between the worthy and the unworthy ? or must the faulty person never be reprov'd or punished, how much soever he deserves it, because supposing his case to be ours, self-love would produce the same partial wishes in us, as it doth in him ? At this rate there would be little room for prudence in our conduct towards others ; justice must lay aside its sword, and charity, by observing no measures, would soon destroy itself. A man who does not know what to do with his own time or money, is very importunate with others to throw away theirs ; but surely this, instead of being an obligation upon them to be idle and extravagant, that they may please another man's *humour*, will not be any manner of excuse for their complying with the temptation.

2. THE question therefore is what we desire and expect *with reason* : I say, *with reason*, because reason, and not *blind desire*, is to be the rule of our conduct. And to be able to judge of the reasonableness of our desires and expectations, it is necessary that we should lay aside, as much as possible, every corrupt bias, every secret prejudice ; and consider, and weigh things and actions, with
the

SER. I. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 7

the greatest care and impartiality. It is here supposed by our Saviour, that as we have a natural faculty of discerning between good and evil, so we have used and improv'd it; and are acquainted with the nature of actions, whether good, evil, or indifferent: for we must remember, that the design of this rule is, not so much to help us in discovering what is just, and good, and equitable, in itself consider'd, as to *keep* us from being *blinded* by *self-love*, when we are enquiring after our own duty; and to convince us, that the nature of actions being the *same*, and so likewise the nature of men, whatever we can reasonably demand of others, they may as reasonably expect of us. But now what expectations are reasonable, and what are not, we must have some other way of judging: and what is this way but to consult with *reason*, and with the *word* of God? What is reason in itself, we may reasonably expect and desire: and can there be a more proper judge of what is reasonable, than *reason* guided and assisted by divine *revelation*? To this therefore we are to have recourse in all matters of duty, whether towards God, our neighbour, or ourselves. The duties between man and man particularly are to be settled in this way. There are things which are

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^a *true and just, and lovely and honourable, and of good report*; such things have the *praise* of man, and which is much more to be consider'd, ^b have *praise from God* too. What are these things? It is not *impossible* for any man to find them out; I may say, not very *difficult*, if we are but *willing* to know them: for they are such things as immediately approve themselves to an honest and upright mind, being agreeable to that *natural sense* of moral goodness, which God has implanted in us, suitable to the *relations* which men stand in to one another, and adapted to promote the *peace and happiness* of *all* mankind. Having thus discover'd what things are reasonable in themselves, and consequently reasonable for us to expect and claim from our fellow creatures; we are then to call to mind, that the obligation is *mutual*, and the rule of behaviour *universal*; that what we justly expect from others, they may justly expect from us; and that all things whatsoever they reasonably expect from us, it is highly reasonable and just we should in answer to their expectations do for them. But then,

3. THE *difference of cases and circumstances* is to be consider'd and allow'd for. There is a great variety in the conditions of men, and in the relations between them, and each con-

^a Philip. iv. 8.

^b 1 Cor. iv. 5.

condition and relation has its separate duties. Nor does my expecting this or that from another man, as a part of his duty to me, make it my duty to perform the *very same* things to him. Since this would confound those very relations, from which those duties are derived. Parents and masters require obedience from their children and servants, but are not therefore obliged to pay it to the very persons from whom it is due to them. I am therefore either to imagine a change of circumstances, placing my self in the room of another person, and that other person in mine; or I am to consider the conduct, to which I esteem those obliged, who bear the same relation to me that I do to some others. The same man may, in respect of different persons, be both a superior and inferior, a father and a son, a master and a servant. Here then the rule prescribed in the text properly comes in; for whether some sustain the *very same* relations to me which I do to others, and I would have them (as I think, not without reason) do this and that for me; or making the case my own, I should censure another man, as not discharging his duty, who did not act in the manner I would have him; I am to reflect, that this is the way of dealing and behaviour which I am to observe towards others, where

where the cases are parallel: what is *one* man's duty is *every* man's; and accordingly I must not except my self any more than I would any other person whatsoever, but be as sincere and impartial in the study and practice of my duty, as I would have all other men to be, and judge it reasonable they should be in respect of theirs, especially when the debt is owing to me.

4. WHETHER this rule be express'd in a *positive* or *negative* manner, the *sense* of it is still the *same*. In the text it is *positively* express'd, *All things whatsoever ye would men should do to you, the same also do ye to them*; but in the *Apocrypha* the expression is *negative*, *Do that to no man which thou hatest*: so we meet with it in some *beathen* writers, *Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*. It may indeed be observed to the honour of our blessed master, that the precept, in his manner of delivering it, is *most* strict, and full, and generous. If we are barely inoffensive, we fulfil the *strict* meaning of the command *negatively* express'd; which may be the reason that our Saviour, not contented with this, expresses our obligation *to do good*, as well as to abstain from doing evil, *directly* enjoining his followers the practice of their whole duty. In common use also, we frequently cite this precept *negatively*,

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gatively, What you would not that another should do to you, do ye not to them. The change of the expression with *us* makes no alteration in the sense, since in both forms of expression the same things are *understood* to be enjoined and forbidden ; tho' the *positive* way in which our Saviour hath chosen to express it, be in *itself* the more extensive and generous. The doing all that is our duty, does necessarily imply our forbearing every thing which is contrary to it : it is our duty to do to another, what in like circumstances we judge he ought to do to us ; and if we practise upon this rule, as it is thus laid down in the nature of an affirmative command, how is it possible we should offend against it, when it is deliver'd in the way of a prohibition ? *Thou shalt not do to another, what thou wouldest not that another should do to thee.* Is not *doing an injury opposite* to a man's always doing that which is *just and right* ? and *speaking evil* of another, to our always speaking that which is not only consistent with *truth*, but with *charity* and brotherly *love* ? He who in every instance which offers does that which is good, will never do that which is evil ; especially if he acts from a *right* principle ; since the same principle which prompts him to be kind to another, will much more restrain him from being injurious. And this suggests another particular.

5. THIS

5. THIS rule, together with the *outward* action, takes in the *affections* and *dispositions* of the *mind*. We would have another to be *well-affected* towards us, and we esteem it reasonable that he should be so, that he should act, and be acted by a principle of benevolence; should be *ready* to help us as often as there is occasion, out of *inclination* and *choice*, and not merely upon other motives and considerations, which have no respect to us. Other motives may not so constantly influence a person; but *love* is a perpetual spring of good actions. It is certain then, that every man would have the duties which every other man performs to him proceed from *love*. We desire this, not only to secure the performance of external duties, but because it is natural for one man to desire the good-will as well as the good offices of another: insomuch, that if these two could be separated, and a person could make sure of all that another was able to do for him, but at the same time knew that the other inwardly hated him; or at best, that he had nothing but neglect and disregard for him in his heart, and would not do the least thing for him on his own account; I believe there is no one, who examines the sense of his own mind, but must be sensible, that all this would not satisfy him.

THE sum is, we are to enquire what is *just* and *reasonable* in every case and circumstance, both as to the *action* itself, and the *principle* from which it flows ; and, whatever we account reasonable in *itself*, and making it our *own case*, should think it highly *reasonable* for *another* to practise towards us, we must remember to do *ourselves*. Every part of our behaviour, in relation to others, must be govern'd by this rule : ^d *We must love our neighbour as ourselves* ; that is, we must love him with the greatest *sincerity*, for thus it is we would have our neighbour to love us : and we must make it manifest that we love him by all the *fruits* of love, that is, by not doing any thing of which he will have cause to complain, and by doing all which he has cause to expect and demand from us. And thus these two laws of our Saviour, *All things whatever ye would men should do] to you, the same also do ye to them* ; and, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, differ in little else besides the expression. Our whole duty towards our neighbour is comprehended in each of them ; one of them immediately denoting the *cause*, the other the *effect* : but one implies the other, and is connected with it ; love with doing good, as the effect, and doing good with love as the cause. Having explained the rule, I proceed,

II. To

^d Matth. xxii. 39.

II. To apply it to some particular *instances*, for the fuller illustration of it, and that it may be more useful to us in the course of our practice.

I. ARE we not willing to enjoy a *liberty* of *judging* for *ourselves*, and of *acting* according to that judgment? And do we not reckon it hard and unreasonable, in any one who would invade this liberty? or, in any degree abridge or restrain us in it, where it is not to the prejudice of others? In this case, ('tis plain, we are to allow the *same* liberty to all *others*, which we claim *ourselves*. Every man's reason, and understanding, and so likewise his conscience (which is nothing else but reason, determining in respect to duty) is his own, and he is to make the best use he can of both; nor can he be justly disturbed or hindered herein, since he alone is to answer for the faculties he has received from God, and the use and improvement he makes of them. To what purpose has God given me the understanding of a man, if I must have little or no regard to it in things of the highest importance? but, like the cattle of the field, instead of following the conduct of my mind, go where I am *led* or *driven* by others? To what purpose have I a conscience of my own, if I must set my conscience by another man's, and am not

not permitted to exercise that power over myself, which I have over my clock? This is acknowledged to be good reasoning by all, where the question is concerning themselves; and where the notions or practices imposed, would bear hard upon their own sentiments or choice. If they are not of the same mind with the imposers, and were they left to themselves, would chuse a quite contrary way to that which is chosen for them, are they not immediately ready to ask, with some kind of indignation, what have others to do to make a faith for me? or to prescribe how I shall act in religion? Must it not be better to profess, what I *really* believe, than what I do'nt? and to worship God in that way, which I think most agreeable to reason and scripture, than in another which appears to me less agreeable to both? As this is the judgment we naturally make in our own case, we should take care how we contradict it in another man's. Perhaps we are, in our own judgment, for the things imposed; and so can be easy enough as to our own part, notwithstanding the imposition. But suppose our judgment was on the other side, would not that which is now light, be then a burden and a grievance? Let this teach us not to encourage an imposing humour in ourselves or others. We all love liberty, and ought to have it in things
which

which do no ways entrench upon the rights and privileges of other men. It will not justify the imposition, that it does not come from a single person, but from a body of men; for let the number of imposers be what it will, the rule cannot be dispenc'd with; still they are to do as they would be done by. And can they say, they would be content, if others had the power in their hands, to be treated by them, as they now treat others? They cannot truly say so.

2. WHAT man is there who does not desire, that all others should be *punctually just* and *honest* in their dealing with him? and who is not ready to complain aloud, if they take any advantage against him? It may be observed of those who are the least scrupulous of defrauding others, that they can't bear to have their own arts turned upon them: they are no sooner touched themselves, but they cry out, as if all justice and honesty were banished from the earth. The instruction from hence is, that we ought to be very careful how *we go beyond and defraud another in any matter* whatsoever. In the law of ^e *Moses*, a man is forbidden to *have divers weights in his bag, a great and a small, or divers measures. A perfect and a just weight, a perfect and a just measure shalt thou have.* They

^e Deut. xxv. 13, 14, 15.

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They were not to make use of *one weight* and *measure* in buying, and *another* in selling. In like manner we may say of the general rule of traffic, that we are not to have one rule in our expectations from others, and a different for our dealings with them; but must go by the same rule ourselves by which we expect they should go. When any man was punished for acts of injustice under the emperor *Severus*, the cryer was commanded to pronounce this sentence aloud; *Do not to another what thou wouldest not another should do unto thee.* And when this prince was marching against the emperor of *Persia*, if any of his soldiers, in passing near orchards or gardens, trespassed upon the owners, he punished them severely for it: or if the quality of the persons exempted them from punishment, he reproved them, by this question; *Would they be willing to be thus treated in their own estates?* A man may have private opportunities of defrauding another; but whatever the temptation in that case be, he should consider, that as God sees him, and will call him to account, so he himself expects that others, and particularly the person to whom he is tempted to be unjust, should, in respect of him, avoid all *secret* as well as *open* ways of wrong. 'Tis the *injury*, not merely the *manner* of doing it, which we resent, whether it be by violence

or by fraud ; with dexterity, or in such a way as shows a man not to be master of his trade. All this does not make any difference in the guilt, or in the resentment we have of the wrong which is done us. Put the case of another man's imposing upon our ignorance, or making a gain of our necessity ; should we not have an ill opinion of him upon this account, as soon as we knew it ? and yet what more common, than such practices as these ? A plain proof that men do not set this *golden rule* before them as they ought to do.

3. *TRUTH* and *sincerity* are qualities which we approve in *others*, and look upon as so necessary, that nothing can excuse the want of them ; and shall *we* be *without* these qualities which we *praise* in others ? or do that *ourselves* which we should condemn in *them* ? Sincerity hath every one's good word, as indeed it well deserves it ; being, in itself, one of the most amiable qualities in the whole world. To be sincere, is a character which all are fond of ; and which therefore, one would think, all should endeavour to secure by a suitable behaviour. But alas ! we are too often content to give this, and other virtues, our good word, leaving it to other persons to practise them. And if others do not practise them, they shall be sure to fall under our censure.

But

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But why should we think it enough only to speak well of any virtue, when we think more than this necessary in every person besides? We shun and abhor a *liar*, and why should we not abhor *lying*? * *Lie not one to another*, is one of the laws by which christians are obliged to walk, and the same is a law enjoined by nature and reason upon all mankind. All men are sensible of the great use and benefit of *truth* to society; and experience and observation shew, that in the same degree as *truth* and *sincerity*, and other kindred virtues, are cultivated or neglected, communities flourish or decay. What pleasure is there in those conversations from whence sincerity is banished? Who would chuse for his friend one deficient in this quality? Be he only a common acquaintance, a neighbour, nay, a stranger, into whose company we light by mere accident, we expect that tho' he does not tell us *all* that is in his heart, he should not tell us what *is not there*; that he should utter nothing but *the truth*, tho' he be not obliged to utter the *whole truth*. The faculty of speech is one advantage, among many, which mankind have above the beast, they can communicate their thoughts one to another; and by this means instruct, advise, and comfort one another: but then, if this faculty be diverted

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from

* Coloss. iii. 9.

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from its right use, and instead of being employed, as a band and endearment to society, it is turned into an art of deceiving one another, there cannot be a worse application of the most excellent gift. Were lying and insincerity the universal fashion, there would be no living upon such terms; men had much better affect solitude and retirement, and be struck dumb, than speak to no better purpose. But *necessity* obliges men to be observant of the laws of truth in some degree. And let me speak it to the honour of human nature, that *inclination* hath as great a share in this effect as *necessity*. For ordinarily, I believe men do not love lying, for lying sake; but make use of a lye to cover some other fault, or sacrifice *truth* to *gain*. But whatever be the reason or motives of our breaking the laws of truth, we are without excuse. If a lye be employed, as the means in the accomplishing some act of *injustice*, the sin is double; or if it ends in a *bare deception*, tho' we are not so guilty as in the former case, yet we are far from being innocent. There needs no other proof of this, than that we lay our hands upon our hearts, and ask ourselves, whether we should take it well of any one to mock and delude us, tho' it were in things of no consequence? whether we are satisfied to converse only with the *outsides* of men, and to be put off
with

with words and actions, which do not express their real thoughts and sentiments?

4. THERE are few so indifferent to their *reputation* and *good name*, but they would have others to be tender of it. Indeed for a man not to value the name and reputation of virtue, would be too sure a sign of his not being very solicitous about the thing; and I believe it is so far from common for those who love and practise virtue, to despise the credit and esteem which it generally conciliates; that, on the contrary, even those who are most addicted to any vice, are yet unwilling to suffer the reproach of it. Men are hardly more sensible in any thing than here, the least injury to their *good name* touches them to the quick. How happy were it, would people, when they are making free with others, reflect a little on themselves. “Is it thus I myself would be treated?” “would I like to have dirt thrown upon my character? The command is, ^f *Speak evil of no man*, and why should I, when I would have no man speak evil of me?” Let me appeal to every man’s conscience, whether he does not esteem it a just ground of complaint, to have things laid to his charge of which he is not guilty? to have the worst construction put upon his actions? to have every flying story, every idle report, which

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^f Titus iii. 2.

is to his disadvantage, presently credited? to be slandered, and misrepresented, made the object of contempt and ridicule, or exposed to the hatred of others? Certainly we can none of us be very easy under such treatment: and can we imagine it can be any more agreeable to others, than it would be to us? why should we needlessly grieve another? why should we say any thing which may be to his prejudice? can we take *pleasure* in giving others *pain*? can we rejoice in what lessens another person's reputation, as much as we should do in having an addition made to our own? if so, 'tis a sign that we are of a temper which ought to be corrected, and of which we have no reason to boast. If we report any evil of another which is not true, it is downright *injustice*: nor must we think to come off by saying, that we have reported no more than was told us: it may be so. But did we believe it to be true, or take any one step to search out the truth? but granting it to be true, and that we have reason to think it so; must we therefore presently spread it abroad? This is no part of *charity*; it is not what we would have done to ourselves. If no good end is answered by it, and our neighbour suffers, it is not only more *generous* to be silent, but more *equitable* too. And as we should be silent rather than speak evil; so
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when another deserves it, we should be ready to speak well of him: we should defend his reputation when justly attacked, and set his actions in the fairest light. This is the ^e *truth* in which *charity* is said to *rejoice*. It is such *truth* as makes for the credit and honour of another.

5. WE should expect to find in others a *readiness* to *compassionate* and *help* us in our *necessities*. We should not go away contented with good *words*, or good *wishes* only, but look for something more substantial. Now the relief and succour to which we should think we had a sort of right, if we needed them, let us freely and cheerfully afford to them who are in distress; hereby testifying the sense we have of the sufferings of our fellow-creatures; of the mutability of our own condition, and our obligations to the providence of God, for that their case is not ours. ^h *To do good and to communicate we should not forget; because with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.* It would very much tend to soften the hearts of men, and to draw forth their bowels of compassion towards the indigent and the miserable, would they endeavour to represent to themselves, in the liveliest manner they were able, the deplorable condition, and what a sad thing it must be to be helpless

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^e 1 Cor. xiii. 6.^h Heb. xiii. 16.

and friendless : would but they reflect that there is something grievous in being obliged to implore the help of others, and how much *more*ⁱ *bleſſed it is to give than to receive* : tho' we ought to be contented if the latter of theſe were our lot ; we ought I ſay to be contented, but we cannot be blamed, that we are better pleaſed when it is in our power to remove or abate the miſeries of our fellow-creatures. And if we may rejoice in the *power* to do good, much more in the *inclination* : nay, the *power* is what no one ſhould deſire for its own ſake, and ſeparate from the uſe, which ſerves for nothing but to enhance our guilt. Wherein does the glory of the Deity conſiſt ? not ſurely in the bare poſſeſſion of Almighty power, but in the exerciſe of it for the good of his creatures ; in being a benefactor to mankind, and the refuge of the weak, the neceſſitous, and the oppreſſed. It is thus that God uſes his power ; and no farther than we employ thoſe little portions of power, which he communicates to us in the ſame manner, can we hope to pleaſe him. Would we pleaſe the merciful God, it muſt be by acts of mercy, ^k *by looſing the bands of wickedneſs, and undoing the heavy burdens ; by letting the oppreſſed go free, and breaking every yoke ; by dealing our bread to the hungry, and bringing*
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ⁱ Acts xx. 35.^k Iſai. lviii. 6, 7.

SER. I. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 25

the poor that are cast out to our house; when we see the naked by covering him, and not hiding ourselves from our own flesh. He who needs our help and assistance, is partaker of the same flesh and blood that we are; he hath the same nature with us, and we share in all the same infirmities with him, and therefore cannot answer it to our own minds, if we deny to succour him when we are able. We are not so vain as to think, that we are self-sufficient and immutable, we may need the pity which is desired of us; not to mention our dependence upon God for every thing; and what title can we have to the friendship of God or man, if we seldom or never do any kind and friendly actions ourselves? Nor should we be satisfied with shewing kindness to such as are fallen under *want or calamity*; for

6. *WHATEVER* another man can do to *promote our welfare or happiness, or keep off any evil from us, without injuring himself, we expect he should do.* Nay, we think it reasonable that he should be contented to suffer a *lesser* inconvenience, and to sacrifice a *smaller* interest of his own, when hereby he can procure us a *more than ordinary* benefit. It is not enough that we refrain from doing *evil*, but we must likewise ¹ *do good as we have opportunity.* And who is there that
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¹ Gal. vi. 10.

hath not opportunity of being beneficial to others in some kind or other? We are all linked together in society, and mutually dependent upon one another; and should each of us mind not his *own* things only, but every man also the things of *others*. We are obliged to this, not barely as we are members of a *christian*, but *civil* society: each member ought to regard the welfare and prosperity of all the rest as its own, because after this manner it would be regarded by them. What saith the law? ^m *Thou shalt not see thy neighbour's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them, thou shalt in any case bring them again to thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh to thee, or if thou know him not, then shalt thou bring it to thine own house; and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with every lost thing of thy brother's. Thou may'st not hide thyself; that is, pretend not to know any thing of it. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox, nor his ass, fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: that is, take no notice of them. Thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again. The meaning is, "in whatever thy brother needs thy help, thou shalt not deny it him, when providence furnishes thee with the ability."* Thus

^m Deut. xxii. 1, 4.

Thus we are to act in the common occurrences of life, and much more in things of greater concernment. When a *man himself goes astray*, it is of much greater importance to him, than when his *cattle* or his *sheep* do so ; and accordingly we should do our utmost to bring him again into the right way. We should indeed seek occasions of usefulness, and never overlook those which fall in our way, and which we could not but observe, if we *loved our neighbour as ourselves*. A *selfish* spirit is universally a thing of evil report, and a *publick disinterested* spirit of good report. There is no person but censures the one, and praises the other. And should we not then every one endeavour to make this temper his own ? Should we not watch against selfishness in ourselves, and be so clear-sighted as to discern, and so impartial as to own the odiousness of it in our selves as well as in other men ? It may fall in our way to do another some considerable kindness ; and how can we find in our *hearts* to decline it ? should we not rather look upon it as a favour of *providence* to us, that we have an ability for so good a work, and a call to it ; and embrace it with the greatest readiness ? Suppose we are at some expence of time, or pains, or money, should we think this an excuse in another, when he could be greatly pro-

profitable to us? and why then should we esteem it a better plea in our mouths than in theirs? We *christians* have an example which should shame us out of such narrow selfish views, and make us study those things which are the most excellent, and praiseworthy. The example I mean, you will easily apprehend to be that of our *blessed Saviour*, who both lived and died for others, to whom he was originally no way related; but voluntarily became so: tho' in order hereto, he was forced ⁿ to *humble himself*, that by *partaking of flesh and blood with us*, he might make us partakers of his most invaluable benefit: he *pleased not himself*, but renounced his own ease, and all those things which are most valuable to mankind, that he might be more extensively useful by his actions and sufferings, and by his example in both. ° *He went about doing good*: ^p let us go and do likewise.

7. HATH another *offended* us, or done us *wrong*? we should not make any difficulty to *forgive* him; for such is the temper we would have him be in towards us, in case we were the *offenders*. ^q Our blessed Lord frequently inculcates this doctrine of *mutual forbearance* and *forgiveness*, making it an essential part of his religion. When one of his

ⁿ Philip. ii. 8, &c. Heb. ii. 14, &c. ° Acts x. 38.

^p Luke x. 37. ^q Matt. vi. 12, 14.

SER. I. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 29

his disciples came to him and said, *' Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?'* *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee until seven times; but until seventy times seven:* that is, without setting any bounds to thy self, as often as he repents of the offence he has committed, so often thou shalt be ready to forgive him; and not upbraid him with what is past, if thou hast reason to think he is sincere in his return to thee. Our Saviour illustrates this command by a parable of a *servant*, who ow'd his master *ten thousand talents*, which after having implored his pity, his *Lord* *frankly* *for-*
gave him. Instead of following this noble example, the person thus obliged had *no compassion* upon a fellow-servant, who ow'd him a small sum, which he was not able to pay, but immediately *cast him into prison till he should pay the debt:* which being reported to his lord, provok'd his indignation to that degree, that he presently recall'd the favour which the servant had so unworthily abused, and exacted the debt, which he had express'd his inclination to forgive. We are all fellow-servants of the same supreme Lord and Master, and we are all deeply indebted to him, not only to his goodness for the favours and benefits he continually heaps upon us, but to his justice, by reason of the innumerable sins and trans-

gressions

gressions against him, of which we are guilty: yet he forgives us, or is ready to do it, upon our repentance, and our forgiving every one his brother his trespasses. But my present argument does not so much turn upon what we desire that our Lord should do, but what we would have our fellow-servants do to us. Whatever right we may have to resent an offence or injury in a proper manner and degree, no man has a right to be implacable and unforgiving. When we hear an apostle of Christ saying, *‘Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; allow room or time for your anger to subside again; we are to consider, that as this is the language of inspiration, so likewise of natural reason. Reason forbids us to be of a revengeful spirit, we commend the contrary, and we expect it in others; and therefore should endeavour to be examples of it ourselves. There may be some pleasure in revenge, but there is a much greater and better pleasure in forgiving. The pleasure of revenge belongs to the most malignant, and diabolical spirits; the pleasure of forgiving is God-like: the former is but for a moment, the latter is lasting. A man can never have any satisfaction in doing what his own mind disapproves, and but little pleasure; for as soon as he comes to reflect,*
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† Rom. xii. 19.

the pleasure vanishes, and remorse and trouble succeed. There is hardly any one of that unhappy temper, but he repents sooner or later of having fulfilled the dictates of his revenge : but when did we ever hear of a person who in cool blood repented of having practised lenity and forgiveness ? I shall mention but one instance more, in which we should walk by this *golden rule*, and that is,

8. IN the returns of *gratitude* for kindnesses done, or favours conferred upon us : for tho' the benefit be never so disinterested, and without all view to a return ; yet no benefactor, not even the most generous, can help being displeased with *ingratitude*. The reason is, that the *same* temper of mind disposes a person to be *liberal* and *grateful* ; liberal and kind to others where he can be so, and grateful wherever others are kind to him. The man who is ready to oblige, will be as ready to acknowledge his obligations ; no man has a greater or more natural abhorrence of ingratitude than he : not out of *self-interest*, to which he is a stranger, but from a *rectitude* of heart and judgment, which gives him an aversion for every thing which is contrary to reason, and unworthy of the human nature. But then, tho' the most generous souls have the quickest discernment of the baseness of ingratitude, there
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are none who are altogether insensible of it in others, especially when they themselves are concerned. There is, indeed, a great difference in the *principle* upon which several persons resent a favour in point of gratitude towards themselves: one man resents it, at least chiefly, because the good he did being out of ostentation, or upon self-interested views, he loses his aim when it is not acknowledged, and vexes himself at the disappointment; another resents it because gratitude is in itself a most amiable virtue, and no one can be defective in it, without being wanting to one of the most essential duties of life. However, let the *principle* be what it will upon which we detest ingratitude in another, we are taught hereby to look home into ourselves, and to take care we be not guilty in our turn: we should cherish in ourselves a grateful temper, and guard against the contrary; we should be forward to own the least kindness from the meanest person, even the good intention or the good-will, should not be forgotten, but wheresoever they are observed, they call for a return; and much more then do real benefits, especially if they are considerable. We should be far from lessening and undervaluing the favours we receive, or overmagnifying those we bestow. The man who has a true greatness and nobleness of soul

soul, will keep at an equal distance from both these.

LET me add, tho' it be a little out of my way, that we should above all things labour to maintain in ourselves a *grateful* sense of the *divine* benefits, which do infinitely exceed those we can receive from our fellow-creatures, both in number and value. Would we have others be grateful to us? and shall we approve ourselves ungrateful to God, who has laid such obligations upon us, as we can never lay one upon another? Do we make it a point of honour not to do evil for good? the more inexcuseable we, if we do not make it a point of conscience to refrain from sinning against that God, who is continually loading us with his benefits. Let us dwell a little upon this thought, and we shall feel the force of it. It is very strange it should be so, but so it sometimes is, that they who are not chargeable with *injustice* and *ingratitude* towards a mortal man like themselves, do not scruple to be guilty of both towards the God who made them; not considering, that what would be *bad* towards *men*, is inconceivably *worse* towards *God*: for is it not an evident truth, that *all things are originally from God*? so that all our other obligations resolve into those we are under to the Author of our beings, from whom we have derived all our rights and

advantages ; every thing which we enjoy, either immediately or remotely, either as the gift of his providence or a favour which the same providence had enabled some other person to do me. But what are those *common* mercies, however valuable in themselves, compared to those *spiritual* and *eternal* blessings, which our gracious God bestows upon us, or puts us into a capacity of obtaining ? what are all other things which he gives me, compared with the *gift* of his Son, and all the inestimable benefits consequent upon it ? and for all these benefits, can I owe a less return than *gratitude* ? Let none say, that they are very sensible of this, and have a thankful sense of the goodness of God to them, who at the same time live in the customary violation of the commandments of God, tho' it be but of *one* of them : for true *gratitude* does not *consist* in *words*, but in *actions* : where there is *gratitude* in the lowest degree of sincerity, there will be love to our benefactor, and an endeavour to please him. It is a very just expectation that man gratefully obey the will of God, since these two, *gratitude* and *obedience*, always go together. But how absurd would it sound ? how plain and shocking would the contradiction be, should we talk of a *grateful* rebel, an *ingenuous* sinner ?

finner? these are ideas which cannot be reconciled.

HAVING thus explained this *rule* of our Saviour in several instances, which was the second thing propos'd, I should now proceed,

III. To show the great *reasonableness* and *singular excellency* of it : but of this in another discourse.





S E R M O N II.

The reasonableness and excellency
of the great Rule of Equity de-
monstrated.

M A T. vii. 12.

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye
would that men should do to
you, do ye even so to them: for
this is the law and the prophets.*

IN treating this excellent rule, I undertook
to do the three following things, two of
which I have dispatch'd.

I. To *state* and *explain* the sense of the
rule here given by our Saviour, for our deal-
ings with and behaviour towards one ano-
ther.

II. To apply this rule to particular in-
stances, for the fuller illustration of it, and
that it might be more useful to us in the
course of our practice. It now remains,

III. THAT

III. THAT I show the great *reasonableness*, and *singular excellency* of it. I shall treat of these two distinctly.

I. As to the *reasonableness* of doing to others, as we would that they should do to us, there are several considerations which prove it.

I. THE *natural equality* of mankind, who are all upon a level, 'till providence make a difference between them; and when those *secondary* distinctions are introduc'd, the things in which they *differ* are but *trifles*, compar'd with those which they enjoy in *common*. They may not share alike in the riches and honours of the world; but they have the same intellectual powers and faculties; their nature is the same, and the happiness the same for which they are ultimately design'd: and upon what foundation then does any man assume so much to himself above his *equals*? his *equals* in respect of *natural* capacities, tho' not of *external* possessions; that while they are subject to this equitable law, he should be excepted from it? *Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art who thus judgest.* Art thou a man? and dost thou value thyself upon this distinction? so is every one of those to whom thou art joined in society. If therefore thou respectest the dignity of the human nature in thy self, there is the like reason why thou should'st

have regard to it in another. Is the person whom thou art capable of benefitting or injuring but a man? thou thy self art no more; thou may'st be a richer, a greater, or a wiser man, yet still thou art but a man; thou may'st have had opportunities of improving thy faculties, and setting thy self forth to greater advantages which others have not enjoyed; but all this, instead of dissolving, or weakening the obligation thou art under to do good and not evil, does but strengthen it: all these additional privileges to which thou art advanced above others, are so many motives to be kindly-affected towards those who partake of the same nature with thy self.

2. MEN have not only the *same nature*, but the *same original*. ^a *The rich and the poor meet together; and the Lord is the maker of them all: and therefore 'tis, that* ^b *he accepts not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; because they are all the work of his hands.* If, saith that good man Job, ^c *I despised the cause of my manservant, or my maid-servant, when they contended with me: what then shall I do, when God rises up? and when he visiteth, what then shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb, make him? and did*

^a Prov. xxii. 2. ^b Job xxxiv. 19. ^c Job xxxi, 13 — 15.

SER. II. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 39

did not one fashion us in the womb? 'Tis true, God is *alike* the creator of men and beasts ; but the beasts are not capable of *knowing this*, as we are : if they bite and devour one another, we cannot wonder at it ; because they have no apprehension of their relation one to another, and their common relation to the author of their beings : they have strong appetites and inclinations, but no reason to govern them. But as for man, he must be stupid indeed, sunk beneath the nature God hath given him, if he does not know who made him ; and that the same God who made one man, made all, and made them to be mutually helpful to one another. Let us farther consider, that we have not only one and the same maker, but the *same common parent* ; we are all of the same family, tho' by the remoteness of time, and the innumerable divisions into which this family has branched itself out, it is not possible for us to trace up our pedigree to our first father.^d He who *giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ; hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on the face of the earth : being of one blood,* 'tis but fit we should have *one common rule* to act by in our behaviour towards one another ; being children of the same father,

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^d Acts xvii. 25, 6.

we should not affect superiority over our brethren; but make the equity of the case, and our own just expectations from others, the unalterable measures of our proceedings: otherwise we seem to forget our common original, and behave as if we had no relation one to another. Is not this one ground of that duty, which you believe others to owe you; even that *“you have all one Father, and that one God has made you?”* If so, the same consideration will prove the obligation mutual, and that you owe others the same general regard, which they owe you.

3. THE principle of *self-love* is common to all men: if we love ourselves so do others; if we are carried to seek our own interest and happiness so are they. There is no difference in this respect between men, whatever there may be in some others. It is possible one man may have a juster notion of his true happiness than another, and may not be swallowed up by a regard to himself, as too many in the world are: but whatever notions of happiness men have, and in whatever ways and methods they pursue it, happiness is what they all aim at. Neither can a man be indifferent as to the events, which will befall him, the condition he is in, and the usage he meets with. We are pleased with one sort of behaviour, and displeased with

SER. II. *Of the great Rule of Equity.* 41

with another ; because one is agreeable to our *self-love*, and the view we have to our own interest, the other lies contrary to it. Well then, since *self-love* does thus possess the hearts of all men, 'tis but reasonable that whatever is just in itself, and we are prompted by *self-love* to desire from others, we should readily yield to them, remembering that they are formed in this particular exactly as we are : that our lives and the several comforts of them, are not dearer to us than theirs are to them. Perhaps, I may be apt to fancy, that the obligations which others are under to observe a right behaviour towards me, and to assist me in the design I have to make myself happy, do not so much arise from those things which are in common between us ; to wit, that we have the same nature and the same original, as from something peculiar to myself. It may be, I am placed higher in life than they are ; providence has been kinder to me, or at least more liberal of its external favours than it has been to them : and therefore while I overlook them, and take no care how I treat them, I have cause to be angry with them, if they do the least thing to offend me. But let me reflect never so little, and I shall find there's nothing but *self-love* can make me reason after this *partial* manner ; and consequently, that if *self-love* will justify
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me in such a regardless behaviour towards others, they having the same *self-love*, will be justifiable, tho' they should return me the same usage. It cannot be more unreasonable that *self-love* should render them negligent and unconcerned about the interest of any but themselves, than it is that *self-love* should have this effect upon me. On the other hand, it is not more reasonable that others should consider that I am a creature capable of happiness, and naturally desirous of it, and should therefore refrain from all such actions as would break in upon the peace and quiet of my life; and not only so, but should be helpful to me as they have opportunity, in my attainment of the end which I propose to myself: this is not more reasonable in them with regard to me, than it is, that I should live upon the same terms with them; since they are seeking after happiness as well as I, and can no more than I be contented with deceitful and injurious treatment. I shall only add, that *nature*, which instructs every man to preserve himself, cannot be supposed to teach any man to hurt another; because upon this supposition it must dictate contrary things. The dictate of *nature* is this; that every man be solicitous for his own preservation. But now, that any one man should be capable of preserving himself, if every man was an enemy

enemy to others, or acted as such, would be absolutely impossible: *nature* therefore, or *reason*, not proposing things impossible or contradictory, must direct every individual to seek his own interest in a way consistent with the interest of his fellow-creatures, and conducing to it; because in this way alone the happiness of every individual is a thing possible. So much for the *reasonableness* of this rule. - - - The next thing to be shown, is,

2. THE *great excellency* of it. And here the following particulars deserve our consideration.

1. IT is a rule *always at hand*; every man carries it about with him. We need not be at a loss how we are to act in any affair, which concerns others as well as ourselves, having little else to do but to retire a moment into our own hearts, and examine how it is there. What does *reason* dictate, supposing a change of circumstances? let me not say that this is what I do not know, for the thing is plain enough in itself; what is just, and lovely, and praise-worthy, and what is not. And as this is plain enough in itself, so if I will but give myself leave to think, and bring the matter home to my own case, I have that affection and regard for myself; that whatever is reasonable for others to do in respect of me, I shall be able clearly to discern, at least in all ordinary cases.

Now

Now as *self-love*, which is a quick-sighted affection, will render it next to impossible that I should not be sensible of the obligations which others are under to act after this or that manner, when they are plainly obliged thus to act, my rule is easy and obvious how I ought to behave towards others. For since there is no difficulty in the thing itself, that I may not make a difficulty where there is none, I am to imagine his rights, property, and interests to be in the same scale which mine are in, and then I shall see what weight I ought to allow them. And must not this be owned to be a very great advantage to a rule, that we may whenever we will apply to it? This is the very case here; we are every moment under the influence of *self-love*; *self-love* will set us upon studying the duties of other men towards us, nor shall we be long in finding out those they really owe us; having done which, let us only call to mind, that discovering another man's duty, we have found out our own, and our way is plain before us. But is there not some danger while we are settling the duties of other men, of carrying the matter too far, so as to fancy that to be their duty, which is not? It may be so: but even in this case the *rule* holds good, that we owe to others whatever we think, in the same circumstances, they would owe to us.

us. To avoid both extremes of expecting too much, and doing too little, to which we are alike prone, the best method I know, is this; while we are stating our expectations from others, to consider what they may justly expect from us in the like circumstances; for so much, and no more, may we expect from them. And, on the other hand, when we are enquiring what we owe to them, to reflect on what we would they should do unto us; since whatever we would that they should do to us, the same we are to do to them.

2. IT is a rule which carries its *own enforcement* with it: it is not a mere notion, which tho' never so evident, might make little or no impression, as often as the passions lay on the other side. But we do, in a manner, feel the conviction; *self-love*, as well as *reason*, pleads the cause of our neighbour: and tho' *reason* may plead without being much regarded, yet *self-love* cannot be denied so easily. Hence is that secret pain and self-displeasure, when men have acted unkindly or unjustly towards others, unless by custom they have, in a great measure, destroyed the sensibility of their minds, as well as extinguish'd the light of them. It is not only that *reason* condemns them, but *self-love* raises uneasy reflections within. He who does an unjust thing, cannot forbear thinking

thinking (till he is harden'd to it) *this is not as I would be done by*; and this is such a thought as a man cannot well be easy under: by this means the *rule* comes with a peculiar force and weight upon the conscience, so that we must offer violence to our nature before we can resist it. By the way, let us observe the wisdom of God in so framing us, that even *self-love* should lead us to be benevolent; for so it really does, while we keep it within its proper bounds. There are two inclinations which, among many others, the author of our nature has planted in our souls; the one is an inclination to pursue our *own* happiness, the other an inclination to pursue the happiness of *other men*. Nor do those two inclinations clash and interfere one with the other, any more than the objects of them. The happiness of the whole is not inconsistent with the happiness of particular persons, but includes it; and consequently, no man, by aiming at the general good, can be an enemy to his own. Yet more, *self-love* is not barely *reconcilable* with benevolence; but where it is not hinder'd by false notions, *embraces* it, by making it necessary, for the sake of our own ease, that we should do to others as we would they should do to us.

3. THE *excellency* of this rule appears in its being universal. It contains a summary
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of the duties of the *second* table; and is the foundation of all that God has commanded us in respect of our behaviour one towards another. So our blessed Saviour himself tells us, *that this is the law and the prophets*: that is,

1. THE *substance* of all which is delivered in the *law*, or inculcated by the *prophets* is this: and,

2. THIS is one *principal design* of the revelations of God to mankind in the *law* and by the *prophets*.

1. THIS is the *substance* of all which is delivered in the *law*, or inculcated by the *prophets*. The whole of what we meet with in the revelation which God has made to mankind, relating to the duties of man to man, amounts to this; that every man do that and nothing else to others, which he would that they should do to him. The *law* and the *prophets* speak this language, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And as the *law* and the *prophets* say this, so they say no more than this. Of the ten commandments, six immediately regard the duties between men and men; and should we go them
over

^f Levit. xix. 18.

^z Mic. vi. 8.

over one by one, we should find them all comprehended in this one rule, *Whatsoever thou wouldest, or wouldest not that another should do to thee, that thou shalt, or shalt not, do to him.* As to the five last commandments, there can be no dispute; it being evident at first sight, that no one who observes this rule, can be guilty of *murder, adultery, theft, false-witness,* or even *coveting* what belongs to another; since all these are actions which no man would be willing to have practised towards himself. No one would willingly be injured in his body, or relations, or good-name, or outward estate: the guarding and securing of which was the design of these several commandments. And consequently no one will injure in any of these respects, who governs himself in all his dealings by this rule of equity. The fifth commandment may to some appear not so easily reducible to this rule. The command, you know, is, *honour thy father and thy mother*; under which, all the duties between superiors and inferiors are supposed to be included by way of *analogy*, or similitude of reason. Now it may be asked, how the rule can have place here, where the duties to be performed are different? Superiors owing one sort of duty to their inferiors, and inferiors another sort to their superiors. Of what service can it be in this case, to be

be told, that we ought to do to others whatever we would that they should do to us? Can children have any direction from hence, how they ought to behave towards their parents? or parents how they ought to carry it towards their children? servants to their masters, or masters to their servants? subjects to their prince, or princes to their subjects? The same may be said of husbands and wives. There are *peculiar* duties on each side; and how then can the duties on one side be a *rule* for the other? In answer to this objection, I might observe here, as I did in explaining the *rule*, that however different the relation be in which we stand to others, from that which they bear to us, we may put the case of a mutual change in these relations: so that on this supposition, we shall be related to them after the same manner that they really are to us, and that the same man may, in respect of different persons, at once sustain several relations; which two things alone will solve all the cases of relative duties by this rule: much more when a farther observation, which I made in explaining the rule, is added, *viz.* we would have all to be *kindly affected* towards us; for if we loved in like manner as we would be beloved, this affection will teach men, whatever diversity there is in the relations between them, to

suit their demeanour to these various relations. But without insisting upon these things, I shall farther take notice, that in the greatest variety of relations, this rule may be made useful, if we only consider, that we would have all other persons discharge the duties of the relations they have to us, whatever they are. Thus servants and children would have masters and parents to act suitably to these relations, that is, with humanity, condescension and tenderness: this being so, the rule is plain, that we, on our parts, should be mindful of the relation we bear to them, and the duties thence resulting; that is, servants and children, should behave as servants and children, because they would have their masters and parents to do in all things, as these names oblige them to do. In like manner, parents and masters should reason with regard to their children and servants; and the same should be done by persons in all other relations. They should reflect how apt they should be to blame all those, who are wanting to their duties attending their relations, and then bring the matter home to themselves, and say: "Thus faulty and blameable shall I be, if I prove forgetful of the duties arising from the relation in which I stand to others." By the way, it will be deserving our observation,

longing to such a nature and such relations, but those before mentioned, reverence, worship, love, &c. ? which for this very reason we should be very punctual in performing : otherwise, tho' God is our creator, and a most merciful creator, we shall have no ground either of wonder or complaint, if for our wilful deficiencies in the duties we owe him, he withdraw the tokens of his favour from us, and leave us to reap the fruits of our own doings.

2. THIS is one *principal* design of God's having revealed himself in the *law* and by the *prophets*. All his revelations have been intended to promote the practice of morality in the several branches of it. There is no doubt, that God has had other ends in view besides this : as, for example, to preserve the true knowledge and worship of himself in the world. But if this last was one end, the instructing men in their duty to each other, and prevailing with them to discharge it, was another ; and, which is more, these ends were designed mutually to promote each other. The practice of *virtue* was to lead to the practice of *religion* ; and religion was given to enforce all the obligations of moral virtue. The brighter discoveries which God has made of his nature, and the more pure and uncorrupted the worship which he required ; the greater probability was

was there, that they who were influenced by these as they ought to be, who were brought to fear and love God, and worship him with true devotion of heart, would not be wanting in the duties of justice and charity towards men. The commandments which have an immediate respect to God, are placed first, not only on account of their greater dignity, but because of the tendency they have to prepare the mind for the duties of the second table. In short, the great corruption of mankind, not only in respect of the principles of religion, but also of the duties of morality, was the reason of God's revealing himself by the law and the prophets. Seeing them *filled with all unrighteousness*, God did at *sundry times*, and in *divers manners*, speak to them by *Moses* and the prophets, and at last by his own Son; the design of the *gospel* being the same as that of the *law* and the *prophets*, as we learn from the express words of an inspired writer, ^h *that the grace of God, which has appeared bringing salvation to all men, teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world.* It was not only to teach men godliness, but sobriety and righteousness too, that the *grace of God appeared bringing salvation*; as indeed there is no salvation

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without

^h Tit. ii. 11, 12.

without them. Would not justice, and equity, and universal love, and kindness have been necessary virtues in a state of innocence? could men have been innocent or happy without them? and what should make these virtues less necessary in our fallen state? It can never be that the *grace* of God should make them *needless*, which supplies us with new motives and encouragements to them. Does not the kindness and love of God our Saviour teach us not merely to be just, but kind, and charitable, and beneficent one towards another? and must not every new motive to any duty lay us under a greater obligation to it? and can we safely neglect that to which we are so strongly obliged? They must have a very peculiar way of reasoning, in which 'tis pity there should be any to follow them, who can suppose that the law of *nature*, the law of *Moses*, and the writings of the *prophets*, did so require, and insist upon men's respectively performing acts of justice and charity, as not to be satisfied without it; and yet that these things may be dispensed with under the gospel, which frequently recommends them, and presses them upon us by considerations of the greatest weight: yet, if some men say true, without making them the *conditions* of salvation. What is this but a plain contradiction? that tho' no man under the law of
nature,

nature, or the law of *Moses*, could obtain the favour of God, without the constant performance of moral duties; and tho' God *loves righteousness* as much now as he ever did, and has given all those to whom he has revealed himself in the gospel, greater reason than they had before to love it; yet he will accept some persons without it; or, at best, that he sets very light by it, in comparison of the presumptuous confidence of their being the *elect* of God, and reliance upon the merits and righteousness of Christ, which they call *faith*; and stiff adherence to some opinions for which they can give little or no reason, which they miscall zeal for gospel truth? However such persons may deceive themselves, we may well think our Saviour did not give this *rule* to his hearers, *Whatever ye would that men should do to you, the same do ye also to them*; and then, in order to enforce it, tell them, that was the *law* and the *prophets*; that after all, we should conclude, that tho' this was *law*, yet it was not *gospel*. I freely own, that among *christians* there can be no such thing as true genuine *morality* without *faith*; and I will make no scruple to add, that it is every whit as impossible, that there should be true *faith* without *morality*. These things God hath joined; and what God has joined

together, let no man presume to put asunder.

4. THE great *excellency* of this *rule* may be proved by the consideration of the *manifold advantages* which would flow from the constant and universal observation of it. The world would be a much more comfortable abode than it now is, and wear quite another face, if all the inhabitants of the world, high and low, rich and poor, were careful to set this *rule* before them. We should have no complaints of men one against the other, and all these complaints ceasing, they would not be so apt to complain against providence. For in reality it is not nature nor providence which is unkind to us; but we who are unkind one to another, and give occasion of fears, cares, and sorrows, which would not otherwise have any being. Let us make the supposal, that mankind did not lay snares for one another; that no man sought another's hurt, but every man the good of his neighbour, and did all in his power to promote it; that each could call what he had his *own*, and at the same time used and enjoyed it as if it was not his own only, but a *common* good; that whatever help any one needed, he was sure of having; and that there were no other dangers and evils but such as did necessarily arise from the indigence, and weakness, and

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imperfection of the present state : let us suppose all this, and then think with ourselves, what a change this would make in our condition, and how much to our advantage. Now this is no more than would actually take place, if all men in all their actions were guided by this excellent *rule*. There would then indeed be *peace on earth*; and in such a serene and peaceful season, there would be room for all the fruits of holiness and piety to grow up to greater perfection. With peace, religion would flourish, and every thing which tended to make mankind an happy race of beings, even such as God designed them to be in their creation : they would have more time to apply themselves to the exercises of contemplation, and knowledge, and virtue ; a greater relish for rational, moral, and divine pleasures ; and be more assisting to each other in the attainment of everlasting happiness and glory ; the peace and tranquillity of the world without would be attended with peace and satisfaction in every man's own breast : in short, heaven would be begun upon earth, for in heaven all is peace, and harmony, and good will ; and the more of these are brought down upon the earth, the more there is of heaven. And what can more evidently demonstrate the *singular excellency* of this rule, than such a
view

view as this of the many happy consequences which would reward the observation of it?

LET me now briefly apply this subject.

I. WE here see how well *reason* and *religion* agree in respect of the *duty* and *happiness* of man. Does not God and reason require the same thing of us? what one has made necessary to our happiness present and future, has not the other too? From whence I infer, that since the things commanded by God are reasonable, we not only *may*, but *ought* to consider the reasonableness of them. It is to me surprizing how any can think, as I doubt too many do, that they do God and religion good service by resolving the whole duty of man into the *mere absolute* will and pleasure of God. To the question, why ought we to do and forbear this and that? they don't love to have any other answer returned, but this short one, because God will have it so. And without doubt this is a very good reason, and ought to satisfy, tho' we had no other; since we may be confident if God requires any thing, there is good reason for his doing it, tho' that reason may not be obvious to us. But I hope there is no dishonour done to God or religion, when the duties enjoined upon us are apparently reasonable, to show men that they are so. I hope there is, to say the least

least, no harm in ⁱ *reasoning* with men concerning *temperance, righteousness, and a judgment to come*, in order to convince them, that all the *ways of God are equal*, his *commands holy, and just, and good*; not merely because they are his commands, but in their own nature, and because of their agreement with the nature which God hath given us. But I shall not content my self with saying, that there is *no harm* in giving men such a representation of religion; since, according to my notion of things, we cannot express our value for religion in any other way so well, as in this; unless it be by the chearful performance of all its duties, which, I am very well satisfied, is more promoted by conceiving of religion as a *reasonable* service, than by having contrary apprehensions of it. Is not the *love of God* the most excellent part of all religion? and next to that, if it be not the same thing with it, the love of that which is good, and God-like? and what are the notions of God which are most adapted to beget and cherish the love of him in the hearts of men? those which only set before us the *sovereignty and independency* of the *Almighty*, his *supreme* dominion and *irresistable* power; or those which tho' they omit not a proper regard to these attributes, yet dwell chiefly upon the *wisdom* and

ⁱ Acts xxiv. 25.

and *goodness* of God ? his wisdom in suiting his laws to the nature and circumstances of rational and free beings ; and his goodness in making the happiness of his creatures the end of his dispensations, and not the display of his *absolute* sovereignty ? I am much mistaken if this be not the readiest way to promote the affection of divine love, and to make the sacred fire burn always bright and clear.

AND as the love of God, so likewise the love of that which is good, and will render us like to God, and well-pleasing in his sight, is most nourished and encreased by the same means : not by making all the goodness of whatever God has commanded, to consist in God's having commanded it ; but also in the reasonableness and absolute necessity of the things themselves. This, at least, is the case as to the duties of sobriety, righteousness and godliness in general ; they are intrinsically good, and therefore commanded, and to be lov'd for the same reason as they are commanded, that is, because they are intrinsically good. It is true, we are farther to love and practise our duty, because it is the command of God. But then let us carry this in our remembrance, that even obedience to God must be resolved into the *reason* of the thing : since we are therefore to obey him, because it is reasonable, as we are his creatures, and entirely dependent upon

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upon him for all we enjoy or hope for, as well as upon other accounts. As long therefore as we do not exclude the consideration of the will and authority of God, we cannot be made too sensible of the *reasonableness* of every part of our duty ; nor be blamed if we employ our thoughts about such things as manifestly declare the *reasonableness* of it. There is no question, that all true christians will do what is right and just, even in compliance with the dictates and inclinations of the new nature of which they are made partakers: but then it cannot be denied, that when they do it not only out of inclination, but with a clear discernment of the beauty and excellency of it, the satisfaction will be double ; and they will be constant and vigorous in the practice, as well as less apt to mistake in particular cases, where the temptation is strong on the other side. In a word, our blessed Saviour appeals to the *reason* of the thing, when he saith, *whatsoever things ye would men should do to you, the same also do ye to them.* And his apostle St. Paul does the like, when writing to the *Philippians*, he saith, ^k *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, just, lovely, and of good report ; if there be any praise, if there be any virtue, think on these things.* In which words, he does not only reckon

^k Philip. iv. 8.

reckon up those several properties of a virtuous life and conversation, as the marks by which we are to know it; but plainly mentions them as the reasons and ground of our choice. We are to think on, and chuse these things, that are venerable, and lovely, and the like, for this very reason, that they are true, and venerable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report.

2. WE may from hence learn, how much the great and ever-blessed God tends the happiness of man. It is because he loves us, that he would have us love one another. He therefore prescribes these *rules* both by the light of *nature*, and in his written *word*, relating to the behaviour of men one towards another; which, if observed as they ought to be, have a manifest tendency to promote the happiness of human societies, and to fit men for the more perfect and excellent happiness of a future state. Certainly were not God a lover of man, were not the happiness of this his creature his design in giving him a being, in the powers and faculties with which he has endowed him, and the commands he has laid upon him, he would not have made those things his duty, and placed such a stress upon his performing them, without which he cannot be happy either here or hereafter. What are those things by
which

which we may hope to please God? they are those very things by which we contribute to one another's happiness. Now as his requiring these things shows that he is pleased with them; so his being pleased with our doing these things, which are the foundation of our happiness, is an evident proof of his being pleased with our happiness. Let this therefore be considered as one instance, among many, of God's kind affection to our race; I mean, his commanding us to be kind and affectionate one towards another, and making it the condition of his favour that we are so. Do we pray, that ¹ *God would forgive us our trespasses?* in vain do we hope to be heard, *unless we forgive them that trespass against us.* As a father pitieth his children, and giveth them such things as their necessities require, would we have God to deal with us, bestowing on us his holy Spirit, and all other good things needful for us. It is true, he is ready to do all this, as our Saviour informs us, in the verses before the text. But then, from the connection of the text with them, we are taught, that as we would have God to act like a *father* towards us, we must remember to treat one another as *brethren*: *Therefore, saith Christ, that is, because your Father which is in heaven will give good things to them*

¹ Matth. vi. 12, 14.

them that ask him ; therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, the same do ye also to them : imitate the goodness of God, in doing good one to another, and expect not to receive good from God any farther than you are ready to do good to men. Neither let any one think it a diminution of the goodness and love of God, that he annexes his favour to this condition ; for it is the quite contrary : the condition itself being such, as to discover the great regard which a gracious God has to our happiness, as well as the reward he will bestow upon them who fulfil it. Happiness is the reward, and the condition of this reward is our contributing, as we are able, to our own happiness, and to that of our fellow-creatures. Suffer me therefore once again to take notice of this, and to call upon you to take special notice of it as an example and proof of the love of God to mankind, *that to do to others as we would they should do to us ;* or, which is the same, *to love our neighbour as ourselves,* should no less than the love of God himself be declared to be the law and the prophets. For why is this so much insisted upon, but because of its tendency to promote our peace and happiness ?

3. SINCE it is so, that our Saviour has added the stamp of his authority to this, which

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which was before a dictate of reason ; so that it comes from God not only as instructing us by the light of our own minds, but by the mouth of his son : since this is manifestly the case, and we can have nothing to object to the direction here given us, let us determine, that by the *grace* of God, we will keep close to this *rule* in every part of our future conduct ; that, whether others do or do not make this the measure of their behaviour towards us, we will observe it in all our transactions and converse with them ; that upon no account whatsoever we will think ourselves dispensed from it. That we may thus do, and be blessed, I shall leave with you a *motive* and a *direction*. - - - The *motive* is the *credit* that we shall hereby bring to *religion* ; and this is such a motive that no one, who has a value for religion, can be supposed to slight. It were well if some men, who stand up for the *honour* of *Christ* and his *gospel*, in *other* respects, would consult it *in this*. How exceedingly religion suffers by the contrary is easy to be observed. Men may boast as much as they please of their spiritual attainments, their experiences, their communion with God ; as long as they appear to transgress the duties of *morality*, the world, instead of giving any heed to all their high pretensions, as indeed they do not deserve it, will only look upon them as *hypocrites*.

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crites or *enthusiasts* : whereas when a christian is all of a piece, and with *piety* towards God, and *zeal* for the honour of the Redeemer, joins the practice of *universal righteousness and charity*, his example carries such conviction with it, as forces men to acknowledge that religion must be an excellent thing, which produces such good fruit.

THE *direction* is, that we would labour to get a right notion of what is properly called *self-interest*. Every man's own happiness is his first concern : but wherein does the true interest and happiness of man consist ? in the things of the *body* or of the *soul* ? of *time* or *eternity* ? Surely not in the former, but the latter. Let me therefore begin here, with the pursuit of my own interest and happiness, as it respects my better part, and my everlasting state : the good consequence of this will be, that having this apprehension of my true interest, I shall find that my self-interest, and the interest of other men, do not at all interfere. Our *worldly* interest may do so ; but our *real*, our *noblest* interest cannot. And since these things cannot, where is the temptation to do any thing unjust or uncharitable, in order to promote my private interest ; since the interest I promote by such means can, at most, be only of the present life ; not my spiritual and everlasting interest ? this suffers more by every
act

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act of injustice, than the worldly interest of the person I injure can possibly do. Thus, by forming a right notion of my true interest and happiness, I shall free myself from the temptation of doing to others, in matters of a temporal nature, what I would not that they should do to me; which is one advantage gain'd by it: as another is this, that I shall extend this *rule* to spiritual as well as temporal concerns; so as to think myself obliged by it to do good to the souls of men, as I have ability and opportunity, and be assistant to them in their attainment of everlasting happiness and salvation.





S E R M O N III.

Of the Causes of Mens Inconstancy
in Religion.

H O S E A vi. 4.

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

THIS chapter begins with an invitation to repentance : *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us ; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.* As *Israel* had revolted from *Judah*, setting up a government and worship of their own ; so both *Israel* and *Judah* had revolted from God by their idolatry, and a very great depravity of manners. For this, God saw fit to visit them from time to time with national

tional judgments and calamities, in order to bring them to a sense of their duty, and the things which belonged to their peace, before it was too late. As yet the sentence was not gone forth against them, which is the ground of the promise or engagement the *prophet* here makes them in the name of God, that the punishment of their sins, if they made right use of it, should be quickly followed with the forgiveness of them. This is the meaning of these figurative expressions of God's *healing them*, and *binding them up* : and so likewise of these words, *ver. 2.* *After two days he will revive us ; in the third day he will raise us up ; and we shall live in his sight.* Tho' our condition, to an eye of sense, admitted of as little hope, as that of a person no longer numbred among the living ; yet should we soon see an happy change in the dispensations of providence, if there was but that change which there ought to be in our temper and manners : then *shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord.* His going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain ; as the latter and the former rain upon the earth. To know the Lord, is explained by discharging the duties of a virtuous and a good life, *Jer. xxii. 16.* And if in this sense of the word, they persevered in their endeavours to *know God*, that is, to imitate and obey him, they should then

find that as ^a *their path was like the morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; so would the favour and loving-kindness of God towards them be as refreshing as the *light of the morning*, and not less welcome and seasonable than those *showers of rain*, which fall before seed-time and harvest. Then come in the words of the text, *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? &c.* In which God expresses the very little probability there was of a thorough repentance, and effectual reformation, upon account of their *fickleness* and *inconstancy* in that which is good. If they resolved well, and did well sometimes; yet it was only a *fit* of devotion, which was soon over. It was not long before they repented of their repentance, or acted as if they did. Their goodness was not like the *morning light*, which not only continues, but is still *advancing*; but like the *morning cloud*, which the sun, as he rises, dispels: and if it be farther compared to the *early dew*, it is not in allusion to its property as *fruitful*, but as *vanishing*. Like the *morning light*, the *mercy* of God visited them from on high, and his instructions and admonitions distilled as the *dew*; like the *morning cloud*, their gratitude to God was *vain* and *empty*; and their best purposes and dispositions as *transient* as the *dew*. If the kings of
Israel

^a Prov. iv. 18.

Israel at any time did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, they soon returned to evil; and it was the same with the kings and people of *Judah*: that reformation which began in the reign of *Josiah*, instead of being carried to greater perfection, and farther established by his son and grandson, in their time came to nothing. Examples of this might be easily found in other nations, in which religion is often in a very variable state.

BUT the observation I shall draw from hence, and briefly prosecute, is concerning the *general inconstancy* of mankind, with respect to their pious resolutions and good actions: not of nations and bodies of men, tho' the words are primarily to be understood of the collective body of the *Jews*; but of single persons, in whom we frequently see it exemplified: their convictions die away, their resolutions prove abortive; they *run well*, but don't *continue*; *begin to build*, but leave their work *unfinished*. This is a most unhappy case, as dangerous and fatal as it is common. For which reason I shall not think I misemploy my own time or yours, while we consider,

I. THE *causes* of this wretched *inconstancy*.

II. THE *certainty* that these *ineffective* purposes of amendment, these *mere begin-*

ings and *unsuccessful attempts* to become good, will *not be accepted* instead of true repentance and holiness of life. And,

III. *THE method* we should take, if we would not only make some *entrance* upon the ways of religion, but *go on* in them, and *hold out* to the end.

I. LET us seriously consider what may be the *cause* of this wretched *inconstancy* in religion to which mankind are so generally subject. Why is it, that so *many* (perhaps we might say all enjoying the gospel) in one part or other of their lives are convinced of their duty, their danger, their interest, and seemingly well inclined to behave as this conviction directs; and yet so *few* actually perform what almost all resolve and purpose? is it because they have no *power*, or no *encouragement* to do otherwise? we may be sure that neither of these is the reason. Because where there is *no power* at all, there is *no sin*; and where there is *no encouragement* to exert the power we have, if we are not altogether without sin, yet we seem to have such an *excuse* for our sins, as takes away much the greatest part of their guilt. One represents God as the author of sin, the other as *wanting* in goodness and love to his creatures; which God forbid we should think of him, who is purity and love itself.

I. THAT

I. THAT so many do no more than *begin* well, is not from want of *power*; since God the righteous Governour and Judge of the world never requires beyond the measure of what he has given. ^b *Where he hath given much, he requires much*; where less, he expects less: and by consequence, if it could be supposed that there were any to whom he had given no abilities at all in the matters of their salvation, of them he would require nothing. To assert the contrary, would be to renew the accusation of the ^c *slothful servant*, that God was an hard master, reaping where he had not sown. Of such an unreasonable severity as this, we have no instance among men, whose humours and passions sometimes carry them to some absurd things. None of them demand interest for money which they never lent; or when the time of harvest is come, are angry with their servants for the earth's not producing a large crop of corn, when they knew it was their own order that there should be none put in the ground. The instance that comes nearest to such an arbitrary way of proceeding, is that of the ^d *Egyptian tyrant*, who at the same time that he commanded the task-masters not to allow the children of *Israel* any straw, but to oblige them to gather it for them-

^b Luke xii. 48.
v. 6, &c.

^c Matth. xxv. 24.

^d Exod.

themselves, would not suffer them to *diminish* ought in the tale of bricks which they made before. But surely we can't imagine this cruel tyrant to be herein an image of the great sovereign of the world ; especially when this very thing is recorded to his everlasting infamy in the sacred scriptures ; and he was set up as a terrible monument of the wrath of a righteous God against all such impious and unjust oppressors. Does God wherever the sound of the gospel comes ^e *command all men to repent* ? the reason is, that by the *grace* of the gospel all shall be enabled to repent, who do not wilfully refuse, and resist that *grace*. Will not God wink at the sinful lives of men professing the gospel, as he did at the times of ignorance ? the reason is,

2. THAT men no more want *incouragement* to cultivate their good dispositions, and to pursue their pious resolutions, till they have arrived at an habit of well doing, than they want for *power*. No ; ^f *the grace of God hath appeared bringing salvation to all men*, for this very end, that it might *teach them to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. Not that they might make some few *feint* essays to conquer their lusts, but effectually *deny* them ; not that they

^e Acts xvii. 30.

^f Titus ii. 11, 12.

they might *resolve* well, or perform some *occasional* acts of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness; but make all these the *business* and *character* of their lives. And that which teaches men to do this, is the *grace* or favour and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, which has *appeared bringing salvation*; to whom? only to a *select* number, whom God hath absolutely chosen, to the exclusion of all others? no; but to *all men* who are willing to accept it; which is abundant encouragement for all to set about the work of their salvation, and to be more in earnest, and more diligent in it, than the greater part of the christian world appear to be.

^s *The spirit of God shall be given to those* who humbly *ask him*, and from those who yield themselves to his conduct shall not be withdrawn; by whose continual operations and assistances the unholy shall be made holy, the weak be made strong, and the wavering be established. And where the spirit of God, being thankfully received and entertained, accomplishes these ends of conversion and edification now, he is farther to be regarded as the ^h *pledge* and *earnest* of everlasting glory. No one therefore, I hope, will plead in excuse for himself, when he repents of his sins, and then relapses into them, and after all his fair promises, and repeated
refo-

^s Luke xi. 13.^h Eph. i. 14.

resolutions, never makes thorough work of it; no one, I say, will in this case, 'tis to be hoped, plead that he would do better but cannot, that his chain will not permit him to go any farther, nor has he sufficient motives to make him exert himself, *and strive to enter in at the strait gate*. Whosoever shall plead this, I am sure there is not a single person who has any good reason to do it; for which I appeal to the *natural* notions of men's minds concerning the *righteousness* and *mercy* of God; but especially to the doctrine of the *gospel*, which is design'd for this very purpose, to bring men to repentance and holiness now, and to happiness hereafter.

LET us therefore without any farther delay proceed to enquire what are the *true causes* of this lamentable *inconstancy*. And the most universal, I apprehend, may be reduced to these following heads. 1. Want of *seriously and distinctly considering* the *nature* of the change upon which they are entering; the *reasons* for it; and the *pains* and *time* it will cost to effect it. 2. Being but *half-resolved*. 3. Not exercising a suitable *caution* and *vigilance* in avoiding the occasions of sin, and all those temptations by which they are manifestly in danger of falling back into their former way of living. And, 4. Not *persevering* in the
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the *instrumental* duties of religion ; particularly *prayer* to God in *secret*.

I. ONE most unhappy *cause* of this *inconstancy* in the acts and exercise of repentance, and the more unhappy, because it is an error at the first setting out, is want of *seriously* and *distinctly* considering the nature of that change of life upon which men resolve ; the *reasons* for it ; and the *time* and *pains* it will cost them to effect it. This particular includes three others in it, which it will be proper to treat separately.

I. MEN do not *consider* as they ought the *nature* of that change upon which they resolve, and in which they make some beginnings ; and consequently while they engage in an affair of which they have no clear notion, it is no wonder that it issues no better. They don't consider, that *every* sin is to be forsaken, and *every* duty to be practised : nor do they reflect what these particular sins and duties are, and what is meant by forsaking the one, and practising the other. No, this is what they do not apprehend and revolve in their minds as they should ; that he who wilfully and habitually ⁱ *offends* but in *one point*, is, in effect, *guilty* of breaking the whole law ; that is, does not yield any part of that obedience which God requires ; since from the same sincerity of heart

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ⁱ James ii. 10.

as men are led to obey some of God's precepts, they would have *respect to all his commandments*. " Now, have I duly thought of
 " this, that I must forsake every evil way ;
 " that if *all* inordinate lusts are not mortified,
 " not so much as *one* can be truly so ; that
 " there must be a conversion from every sin
 " to God in every duty ; and this a conversion of the *heart* too, so as not to be a
 " merely outward thing ? if I never thought
 " of this, or did it very slightly, it could not
 " reasonably be expected that the matter
 " would end well. *Is my goodness as the morning cloud* ? Here I see the reason of it, I
 " did not begin right : I did not reflect upon
 " the *universality* of the change which I was
 " purposing. Have I farther considered what
 " those several sins are which I am to renounce, and what those virtues and duties
 " in which I am to exercise myself ? or have
 " I been contented to resolve upon something,
 " I hardly know what ? Here is a very common failure ; few care to have their consciences thoroughly inform'd. This, and
 " that, and the other thing, I am to do, or forbear ; I am to be *temperate*, as well as
 " *righteous* ; *devout* towards God, as well as
 " *merciful* to men ; *pure in heart*, as well as
 " *chaste in conversation*. The law in my mind,
 " as well as in the sacred scriptures, is to be
 " unfolded, and traced into its particular
 " branches ; I am to lay my rule before me,

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" and

“ and to meditate closely upon it, to see my
“ way clear in which I am to walk, that I
“ may not ignorantly go astray: but can I
“ say, that I have ever done this? that I
“ have ^k *meditated in the law of God day and*
“ *night?* have made diligent enquiry into all
“ the particulars of my duty, that I might not
“ leave out any, or be mistaken in any? ’Tis
“ highly probable, if I made some steps in
“ religion, but did not persevere, that this was
“ one cause of it, the neglect to consider what
“ I had to do.-- For want of a distinct notion
of their duty, men find themselves bewildered, are at a loss how to proceed, and never want an excuse for not doing what they ought, or for doing what they ought not, when they are under strong temptations. Not having a distinct idea of their duty, they are easily persuaded to act contrary to it; especially not having at any time seriously considered, and fixed it in their minds, what is intended by forsaking of sin, and performing any duty: that each of these signifies a *prevailing* habit, a *rooted* disposition of soul, attended with a *uniform* regularity in the actions. If instead of having this notion of forsaking sin, and practising holiness, there are any who imagine they have sufficiently mortified a corrupt affection, when they have now and then refrained

^k Psal. i. 2.

refrained from the gratification of it, tho' they as often, if not much oftner, indulge as deny it; and that they have discharged their duty, as far as is necessary, by shewing a regard to it sometimes, tho' not constantly, hereby acknowledging it to be their duty: if, I say, this be the apprehension that any have of forsaking sin, and doing their duty, their inconstancy in religion is no way surprizing; being the natural effect of that erroneous way of thinking into which they are gotten. Such is the dismal consequence of mens not considering the *nature* of that change upon which they seem to resolve.

2. MEN don't seriously consider the *reasons* upon which their purpose of change ought to be founded, and therefore miscarry. The little they do is not the effect of judgment and rational conviction, so much as of some passion accidentally raised in them. Perhaps they are visited with sickness, and this alarms them, and puts them in a fright: or some great affliction has befallen them; the loss of some beloved enjoyment, or some cross and disappointment in life, which has made them for the present out of conceit with the world, and occasioned a temporary parting between them and their sins, as the procuring cause of their calamities. Possibly they have been very much moved with some subject which they

they have heard discoursed upon, or if not with the subject, yet with the manner of treating it ; or with some particular passage in a sermon, which had a peculiar aptitude to strike their imaginations. Hereupon they have been ready to take up resolutions to lead another kind of life : but, alas ! all this while they have hardly any thought of those reasons, which should principally sway them ; such as the inherent and inseparable evil of sin, which renders it absolutely inconsistent with their perfection, and self-enjoyment, till repented of and forsaken, and makes them utterly unfit for, as well as unworthy of the favour and fruition of an holy God : and, on the other hand, the real excellency and intrinsic preferableness of every part of an holy temper and conversation. The change, in order to be lasting, ought to proceed from such considerations as these, or to be attended with them. Did I never lay things to heart ? never spend a single thought upon them, that sin is the disease of my soul, the disorder of my faculties, the ruin of my peace ? that it enslaves and pollutes the mind, and is hateful in its very nature, so as never to be the object of a reasonable choice in any conceivable circumstance whatsoever ? how then can it be supposed, I should hate it as I ought to do ? and without an inward hatred of it, arising from the conviction of its real

hatefulness, what dependence could I have upon my best resolutions, when they come to be tried? did I never seriously think of the great loveliness of a sincere and habitual piety; the necessity of it as an indispensable qualification for my proper felicity, and even a principal part of it; and that the command to lead a sober, righteous, and godly life, is not a mere arbitrary appointment of our maker, but the result of infinite wisdom and goodness? Alas! where is the wonder that I have practised my duty with no greater delight; or that not delighting at all in what is good, I have been so inconstant in it? Have all my good resolutions, and all that I have done in consequence of them, been the pure effect of the working of my passions, my joy and sorrow, my hope and fear, as they have been occasionally moved by the circumstances into which providence has brought me; or by affecting images and representations, without having my understanding at all informed? Hence hath proceeded the fickleness of my resolves; hence my wavering to and fro, and that unsteadiness which hath been so visible in the course of my life: where the foundation is unstable, the building raised upon it must be the same. Can an house stand firm upon the sand? or a ship have any fixedness while it hath no other support but the rest-

less waves of the sea? and how much more constant are our passions? Few things are more changeable than these, upon account of their being owing to such uncertain causes; they rise and fall much as the sea does, by the variation of the winds, and the ebbing and flowing of the tide. Behold the cause to which thousands must ascribe the transient duration of their goodness! ¹ like *the seed which fell upon stony ground, where it had no depth of earth to cover it*; so have their resolutions sprung up quickly from the warmth of passion, but for want of being *rooted* in a just apprehension, and a serious consideration of the reasons, which should induce us to lead an holy life, particularly the respective natures of sin and of holiness, have, in a *time of temptation*, as quickly withered and died away again.

3. MEN don't consider the *pains* they must take, and the *time* that must be spent, in effecting this change. The folly of such a conduct is in a very lively manner represented by our Saviour, *Luke xiv. 28.* — where after he had in the two foregoing verses told the Jews the terms upon which they might be his disciples, he thus reasons with them, *which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he hath sufficient to finish it?*

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¹ Matth. xiii. 20, 21.

lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it, begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. To which similitude of an *unadvised builder*, he adds another, of a king going to war against another king, who, if he be wise, will first sit down and consult, whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him who cometh against him with twenty thousand. To their not taking this method, we must impute it, that so many, who once followed Christ in the time of his earthly ministry, afterwards ^m *went away and walked no more with him*. They had not counted the cost of being a christian, and so when they found what a fight of affliction they must charge through, soon grew sick of their undertaking. And 'tis little different now with regard to persons meditating, and it may be resolving a change of life; as they don't consider what this change is, so neither what it will cost them: hence it is they are perpetually *laying the foundation of repentance*, but leave their work unfinished; declare war against their lusts, but flag in the prosecution of it. The difficulties of religion are to be considered, ⁿ *that we must strive, and run, and wrestle, and fight; that there is a yoke and burden to be sustained,* and

^m John vi. 66. ⁿ Luke xiii. 24. 1 Cor. ix. 24.
Ephes. vi. 12. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

and an *enemy* to be *subduell*: for if this be not considered, we shall neither vigorously exert our own endeavours, nor be earnest in imploring the *grace* of God to assist and render them effectual. It must be owned, we have an extreme on either hand to guard against: we may over-magnify the difficulties and oppositions which we are to encounter; and this is commonly done by those who don't care to engage in the enterprize, and so to excuse themselves, lay the cause upon the insuperableness of the difficulties they are to grapple with; like the ° *spies* who discouraged the hearts of the people with the stories they told them, of *cities walled up to heaven*, and the *sons of the Anakims or giants*, whom they had seen in the land; while *Caleb*, who was of a better spirit, saith bravely, *let us go up at once and possess it, for we are able to overcome it*. This then is one extreme, and, as I observed just now, is the usual refuge of persons averse to religion; they aggravate every difficulty and discouragement, that the thing they are persuaded to may appear impracticable. The other extreme is, of those who have some thoughts and purposes of leading a religious life, they overlook the difficulties of the undertaking; like travellers, who beholding a city at a great distance on a hill, transport

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themselves thither in their thoughts with the greatest ease, but in the mean while forget the many wearisome steps they must take before they shall reach it. 'Tis the part of a wise man to ponder before-hand all the difficulties which are reasonably to be expected, to the end he may not be surprized and unhinged by them; as he would probably be, if they were not thought upon. It is the *principle* upon which difficulties are alledged, and the *manner* in which it is done, that makes it to be commendable or otherwise. That which was a fault in the *spies*, who acted with an evil temper and design, was a good action in *Joshua*; who, after the people had declared their resolution to serve the Lord their God, tells them plainly, *ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God, and jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions and your sins*; that is, 'tis not so easy a matter as you think, to withstand the temptations you will have to draw you off from the service of God, which, if they succeed, will have very terrible consequences, and therefore I would have you think of it again and again; not as if you were at liberty to take which side you pleased, but that you may be established in your duty. Here, alas! is the fatal mistake, which has been the ruin of such multitudes; they have engaged

engaged themselves to God, and herein they have done well ; but they have engaged precipitantly, not considering, that it is a much easier thing to form a good resolution, than to execute it. If I will be [¶] *Christ's disciple*, I must deny myself ; if I will possess the kingdom of heaven, I must take it by force ; if I intend to add to my faith all the other virtues of a christian life, I must begin with fortitude ; [†] add to your faith fortitude, so the translation ought to have been ; a vigorous address to the combat which I cannot safely decline. To continue in well doing, there is [‡] *need of patience* ; but I perhaps have dreamt of an easy passage to heaven ; as if I was not to walk thither in the way of God's commandments, but to be carried without taking any pains myself : being possessed with such an imagination as this, when any difficulty or temptation occurs, as many will occur, especially at the first entrance into the ways of religion, *by and by I am offended*. And then farther, as men do not seriously consider the pains, so nor the time which the effecting of such a change as they project will cost them. Conversion is a work of time. Men are not presently cured of vices which are grown habitual : to root out inclinations which have taken deep root in the

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mind,

[¶] Matth. xvi. 24, 11, 12.[†] 2 Pet. i. 5.[‡] Heb. x. 36. Rom. ii. 7.

mind, and to conquer those passions which have so long reigned, requires time; and the longer men have continued in their evil courses, the longer will it be before they recover the ground they have lost, and make some considerable progress in the way of their duty. Habits which have been long contracted, are not immediately unlearned again, and contrary habits planted in their room. This is an observation which never fails in other cases; and no good reason can be given why it should not hold in the change which true conversion makes in the habitual bent of the soul. Some, indeed, have talk'd as if the *new creature* was an *instantaneous* production, and the habits of grace were *infused* in a *moment*; and I fear this representation of the matter has done no little mischief: for men depending on a *sudden* revolution in themselves, which they are farther taught will be brought about by an *irresistible* hand, when they find themselves disappointed herein, and that they are in danger without great care, and continual vigilance and opposition of returning under the power of the enemy, either conclude that God's time is not yet come, if there is to be any such time, or they have not patience to wait the slow progress of that work, which they flatter themselves would be finished so quickly. It is to be hoped indeed,
that

that in time the difficulties will lessen, and the pleasures of a devout and regular life encrease, and this is encouragement enough to resolve upon such a life; but time there must be, and we should count upon it, not expecting to be at the top of the hill as soon as we have begun to climb it: by little and little we may be sure of conquering every lust, and learning the delightful practice of every instance of christian virtue; but to think of being thorough proficient at once, as it is *vain*, so it is *dangerous*; too often issuing in our being weary of that conflict and so giving it up, which lasts so much the longer than we imagin'd it would do. This is the first *cause* of the *inconstancy* of so many in their good resolutions; 'tis no other than the want of *serious consideration*: they don't consider as they ought the *nature* of that change which they propose, the proper *grounds* and *reasons* of it, and the *pains* and *time* it will cost them to effect it. I have been the larger upon this, because it is so common an error, and so very fatal, and the main foundation of following mistakes.

2. ANOTHER *cause* of mens *inconstancy*, is their being but *half resolv'd*; and this, I doubt, is a very common case: they are so far from being fully determined, as hardly to know which side they shall take; like
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the *Israelites* in the time of *Ahab*, who
^t *halted betwixt two opinions*, uncertain whom
to follow, whether the true *God or Baal*; and
accordingly shifted with the time from the
worship of the one to that of the other: so
these persons have not fixed their choice for
a religious life, tho' to make themselves easy,
they make some feint essays towards it.
And surely 'tis not strange, that such imper-
fect resolutions, which can hardly be called
by that name, are quickly broken. The
apostle *James* has observ'd, ^u *that the double-*
 minded man is unstable in all his ways. The
man who acts as if he had *two* minds or
souls, one of which was taking this way,
another that; perhaps this moment the good
mind, thro' some accidental cause or other,
prevails; but there being another mind con-
tinually pulling him the contrary way, he
gradually cools and flags in his former pur-
suit, and betakes himself to a new one.
An *instability* of conduct is the necessary ef-
fect of such an *irresoluteness* of temper. But
what should make men thus unresolv'd, or
but partly resolv'd, when they are convinc'd
that the change they purpose is necessary?
The most frequent reason of this seems to
be a foolish thought, that tho' it be abso-
lutely necessary they should apply them-
selves heartily to religion *one time or other*,
yet

^t 1 Kings xviii. 21.

^u James i. 8.

yet not that they should do it *presently*; they may have a *more convenient opportunity*; at worst, they have the chance, as they think, of a sick-bed repentance: and, tho' it may be, this does not intirely satisfy conscience, but that they must immediately purpose and do something; yet it divides the stream of their resolutions and endeavours, which all together being but barely enough to stem the torrent of their lusts, and of the examples of the world, when *divided* is not strong enough to do it.

3. ANOTHER *cause* of the same effect, is mens not exercising a suitable *caution* and *vigilance*, in order to avoid the *occasions* of sin, and all those *temptations* which beset them, and indanger their falling back into their former way of living. If they would not fall, why do they walk in the same slippery places? if they would not have their feet taken in the snare, why will they venture to go where so many snares are laid for them? if they resolve not to do as the wicked do, why are they so fond of their company? *Why do they walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and stand in the way of sinners?* Is it thus they intend to secure their innocence, and to maintain their resolutions? O vain imagination! is this acting as if they were in earnest? They would not be thought

thought so, if they took the same course in other matters. A man solicitous for his health, does not chuse to converse among persons infected with some contagious distemper; and 'till they use the same wise care with respect to their souls, all they do in religion will be no better than trifling. Hast thou almost constantly fallen by such a temptation? why then dost thou not keep clear of it? has the conversation and example of certain persons been the frequent occasion of thy breaking over the fences of religion and virtue? and why then wilt thou still associate with such persons? **Depart from me, ye evil doers, saith the Psalmist, for I will keep the commandments of my God:* keep the commandments of God, and they will not like your company, nor you theirs; continue to keep their company, and you will not be likely long to keep the commandments of God. Have such and such things, perhaps in themselves not criminal, betray'd thee into sin, not once, or twice, but often? regard such things as forbidden to thee, and what thou must carefully avoid, as thou lovest thine own soul. What saith the Saviour of mankind, the living oracle of truth? *† If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt,*
or

** Psal. cxix. 115. † Matt. xviii. 8, 9.*

or maimed, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And, if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire. There may be some pleasures and gratifications, the divorcing thy self from which may be like plucking out an eye, or cutting off an hand ; but if they are the cause or occasion of thy falling off from religion, or of others doing so, (which is the proper meaning of the word *offence* in many places of the *New Testament*) no other choice is left for thee, but either to renounce such indulgencies, or give up thy pretences to the love of God and thy Saviour, and a concern for thy own and other mens souls. And, indeed, usually when men make free with the occasions and temptations to sin, 'tis not long that they maintain even the appearance of virtue and piety ; venturing upon a dangerous shore, among shelves and rocks, they quickly *make shipwreck of a good conscience* ; and as they do not always, nor generally meet with a plank upon which to save themselves, I mean *repentance*, that *tabula post naufragium*, they sink and are lost for ever. How was it that the persons meant, where " *the seed is said to fall among thorns*, were
unfruitful,

unfruitful, or *brought forth* no fruit to *perfection*, that is, began and did not continue, much less abound in the fruits of holiness? the reason given is, that the *cares* and *pleasures* of life *choaked the word*: and therefore for one who thinks of becoming a good man, and making a business of religion, and if it be not our business it will signify nothing; for him to give himself up to a life of worldly cares, and sensual pleasures, is such a strange sort of conduct, as can never be reconciled with sober reason. If such persons think *sincerely* of the matter, 'tis evident they don't think *wisely*; they will not quit their old pursuits, but they will keep more within bounds: and have they not often said so? alas! to how little purpose? and from hence it does come, that their *goodness* has been as the *morning cloud*, and as the *early dew*, which quickly *vanisheth away*: and 'till they mend this error, so as to be more cautious and watchful how they run themselves into temptation, and expose themselves to dangers, which they may and ought to avoid, the end of the matter will still be the same. For *God's sake* therefore, I should rather have said, for *our own sake*, and as we have any hope to succeed in the design which we pretend to have formed, let us act a more consistent part; otherwise we shall be *easily turned aside from the way of the holy commandment*.

4. THE last *cause* I shall mention of this *general inconstancy* of men in their change of life from sinful indulgences to the practice of holiness, is their *not persevering* in the *instrumental duties* of religion, particularly the duty of *secret prayer*. The duties of meditation, prayer, hearing and reading the word of God, are neglected by them at first only now and then ; this prepares their way to their being less watchful against temptation, and less fearful of complying with it : and as they yield to temptations and venture upon known sins, this makes them still more indifferent to the duties beforementioned, of which by degrees they lose all the true relish : if they have any regard to them, and delight in them, it being only from a principle of false devotion ; and in proportion as they lay aside their devotion, they become more hardened in the commission of sin : this holds more especially with regard to the duty of *secret prayer*, for which I appeal to themselves. Perhaps there is some other motive which engages them in social worship, and gives them a sort of pleasure and satisfaction in it, which they mistake for a spirit of piety. But if this were the principle from which they acted, how is it they make little or no conscience of *secret prayer* ? In this they have the fairest opportunities to recommend their own case to

to God, to humble themselves for all their transgressions against his righteous laws; to renew their pious purposes, and earnestly to implore and to secure the assistance of the Divine Spirit. And did they from day to day thus maintain their intercourse with heaven, they would be much better prepared to do the will of God upon earth, and to resist and overcome any temptations which should beset them. These two indeed have an happy influence upon each other; a regular and good life to cherish a spirit of devotion, by which we are more inclined and disposed, and better fitted to pray; and prayer upon a holy and good life, as a preservative from those sins to which we shall find ourselves too liable, as soon as we lay aside that best means of our preservation, *viz.* daily and fervent prayer to God.

II. WE are next to consider the certainty there is, that these ineffectual purposes of amendment, these mere beginnings and unsuccessful attempts to become good, will not be accepted instead of true repentance and holiness of life. But this I shall leave for the next discourse.

S E R M.



S E R M O N IV.

Of the Remedies for Inconstancy
in Religion.

H O S E A VI. 4.

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

I N a former discourse on these words, I proposed to do the following things.

I. To consider the *causes* of this wretched *inconstancy*: and here I assigned the following; want of seriously and distinctly *considering the nature of the change* upon which they are entering; the *reasons* for it; and the *pains* and *time* it will cost to effect

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it; being but *half resolved*; not exercising a suitable *caution* and *vigilance* in avoiding the *occasions* of sin, and all those *temptations* by which they are manifestly in danger of falling back into their former way of living; and finally, men not *persevering* in the *instrumental duties* of religion, particularly *prayer* to God in *secret*. These several causes I have treated at large.

II. To consider the certainty that these *ineffective* purposes of amendment, these *mere beginnings* and *unsuccessful* attempts to become good, will not be *accepted* instead of true repentance and holiness of life. And

III. THE *method* we should take, if we will not only make some entrance upon the ways of religion, but go on in them, and hold out to the end. My method leads me now to consider,

II. THE *certainty* that these *ineffective* purposes of amendment, these *mere beginnings*, or little better than beginnings, being only *unsuccessful attempts* to become good, will not be accepted instead of true repentance and holiness of life. For 1. 'Tis certain that the *gospel* requires nothing less of all those who desire and hope for the special favour and acceptance of God, than *repentance* and true holiness. 2. 'Tis likewise certain,

certain, that such an imperfect *transient goodness* as that I am discoursing of, is not the *repentance* and *holiness* which [the *gospel* insists upon. And, 3. It is no less certain, that out of regard both to the perfections of his nature, and the declarations of his holy word, God will not dispense his saving mercy upon any other terms, than those set forth in the *gospel* of Christ; so that vain are all the hopes of those, whose *goodness* is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, which quickly goeth away: their hopes, if they do not pass away as quickly as their *goodness*, nor are quite so inconstant as that; yet pass away they will, supposing them to go on in the same foolish way of acting, and be followed with everlasting despair.

I. 'TIS most certain, that the *gospel* requires nothing less of all those, who desire and expect the special favour and acceptance of God, than *repentance* and *true holiness*. The necessity of these things in order to our obtaining the mercy of God, and being pleasing in his sight, is the language both of the Old Testament and of the New. I shall name but a few places, because I take it for granted, that in a christian congregation, and among persons who read the word of God, or hear it read, there are none who will deny a thing so plain; ^a *Blessed are the undefiled*

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^a Psal. cxix. 1. 3, 6.

in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord: blessed are they who keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart; they also do no iniquity, they walk in his ways: as much as to say, blessedness is the peculiar portion of such, none else must pretend to it. And so again, then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments: intimating, that if he lived in the known violation but of a single command, he should have too much reason to be ashamed before God: ^b he that covereth his sins, shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy. Observe, the condition of finding mercy is not the mere confessing our sins, but forsaking them. To these I shall add one quotation more out of the prophets: *'wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; tho' they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool: provided you abstain from the practice and the love of sin, you shall be purged from the guilt of it; and upon no other terms. Let it not be said, that these citations are out of the Old Testament, and therefore of no weight to us christians, and that the favour promised to the obedient to the law, only relates*

^b Prov. xxviii. 13.

^c Isaiah i. 16, — 18.

lates to the present life ; for because a thing is contained in the *Old Testament* it does not therefore follow, that it belongs to the *law of Moses* as such, or a law peculiar to the *Israelites*. Whatever we meet with in the *Old Testament* of a *moral nature* is unchangeable, and equally a part of every dispensation of religion ; and even the *gospel*, both the *grace* and the *terms* of it, which was not fully published and proposed to the general acceptance of mankind, till the time of our Saviour, was preached to those who lived before and under the legal oeconomy : and hence it is, that the *Old Testament* is frequently cited by the writers of the *New*, when they are explaining the doctrines of the *gospel*. And as our Saviour inviting the Jews to ^d *search the scriptures*, allows them to have the doctrine of *eternal life* in them, tho' not so plainly and expressly revealed ; so that *repentance* and holy *obedience*, which are made necessary to the favour of God in the present life, must in all reason be supposed much more necessary to the rewards of eternal life. As to the *New Testament*, in which we have an account of the doctrines taught by Christ and his apostles, it speaks the same language in this respect with the old ; only strengthening the obligation to an holy life, and carrying it to a

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greater

^d John v. 39.

greater height and perfection. Our blessed Saviour ^e came to call sinners to repentance : his disciples in his name ^f preached that men should repent. ^g All men by the gospel are commanded to do so. ^h Repentance towards God is no less necessary, than faith in the Lord Jesus. Among all the beatitudes pronounced by our Saviour in his sermon on the mount, there is never a one but for those who practise the virtues he recommends to them. ⁱ To those who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will give eternal life; and to none else. ^k The unrighteous, under which are comprehended all who live in the habit of any sin, of whom several are particularly mentioned, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ^l Christ is the author of eternal salvation, but 'tis only to those who obey him. The vision of God is expressive of the supreme and final happiness of man; but now ^m without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The result is, that an holy and good life is indispensibly required by the gospel covenant.

2. 'Tis farther certain, that such an imperfect transient goodness is not that repentance and holiness of life upon which the gospel insists. Is confessing of sin only, the same

^e Matth. ix. 13. ^f Mark vi. 12. ^g Acts xvii. 30. ^h Acts xx. 21. ⁱ Rom. ii. 7. ^k I Cor. vi. 9. ^l Heb. v. 9. ^m Heb. xii. 14.

same as *confessing and forsaking it*? or is sin forsaken by those who are continually returning to the commission of it; perhaps as often as the temptation occurs, and opportunity offers? Can they be said to *repent*, who do not ⁿ *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*? or shall we account those *fruits meet for repentance*, which do not afford so much as a probable proof, even in the judgment of the greatest charity, of a man's having repented? Is that person to be stiled a ^o *new creature*, in whom the same habits of vice still prevail? if this be ^p *putting off the old man, and putting on the new*, then we may say that these expressions have no meaning; that is, none answerable to the words, which suppose a thorough change of heart and life. ^q *He that does righteousness is righteous*, saith St. *John*: the character of a man is to be taken from his *habitual* practice, not from what he does now and then; much less from high-flown pretences, which have nothing to give them credit in the conversation. As we don't esteem him an honest man who defrauds others when he can do it securely, or him a man of veracity, who has been caught in manifest lies, or him a temperate man, who is frequently guilty of acts of intemperance; so nor can

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ⁿ Matth. iii. 8. ^o 2 Cor. v. 17. ^p Eph. iv. 22.
^q 1 John iii. 7.

we call him a *regenerate* person, a *christian*, and a *saint indeed*, who is under the *reigning* power of any sin. 'Tis in vain for such to take refuge in the viith chapter of the epistle to the *Romans*. I confess if *St. Paul* could be supposed to speak all that is there said in the person of a *regenerate* man, those of very bad lives, those who are perpetually sinning and repenting, repenting and sinning, might find enough in that portion of scripture to encourage their going on in the way they are in: for the person there described, is said to have all manner of concupiscence wrought in him by the law; to be carnal, sold under sin, and slain by it; to have sin dwelling in him, as in its proper home; not to find how to perform that which is good; to have a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. Now these being every where in scripture, and by *St. Paul* himself in other places even of this epistle, made the marks of a *bad* man, can never be reconcileable with the *character* of a *good* one, as every truly regenerate person must be; nor intended by the apostle of such a one, concerning whom he declares in the very next chapter, that he walketh not after the flesh, but after the spirit; his actions being directed and governed by the rules of the gospel, not by his fleshly and sinful inclinations; and that the
law

law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus had made him free from the law of sin and of death : directly contrary to what he said of the person meant in the viith chapter, *that he was brought into captivity to the law of sin.* Whoever therefore he be, who is *car-*
nal, and *sold unto sin,* let him delude himself as long as he pleases with these words, of whose true meaning he is willingly ignorant, that it is *not he that does the sinful action,* but *sin dwelling in him,* he must look out for some other patron than *St. Paul,* and for some other law to justify him, than the *law of faith ;* that being as incompatible with the prevalency of any sin, as the law of innocence or perfection was with the least degree of it.

3. 'TIS no less certain, that out of regard to the *perfections* of his nature, and the *declarations* of his holy word, God will not dispense his saving mercy upon any *other* terms than those set forth in the *gospel of Christ.* There is no possible way of evading this. If we will but consider the representation made of the future judgment in every part of the New Testament, we must be all sensible that men will be saved or damn'd eternally according to the sentence which shall then be pronounced upon them. And I beseech you reflect a little what is the foundation or rule of that final sentence ;
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is it not every man's prevailing conduct and behaviour? has not the apostle *Paul* expressly told us, *that God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life?* Observe, here is not the least intimation of God's bestowing eternal life upon those who seek it in any other way, but that of *well-doing*. No; as to every one who *doeth evil*, who *obeys not the truth*, let him boast ever so much of his belief of it, and zeal for it, but *obeys unrighteousness; indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish* shall be his portion. Can any thing be more decisive than this, and many other like passages of scripture are? and is it not amazing, that after all this, there should be any who without leaving their sins, think the gospel has shown them a way in which they may be saved? If you ask them what this wonderful way is, they will tell you by the *righteousness of Christ imputed to them*: now God forbid I should depreciate that righteousness, which I believe to be the great foundation of the gospel covenant. And, indeed, if we consider the righteousness of Christ in this view, as the *ground* of our justification, not as the *matter* of it, there will be no room for any to draw the least en-

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† Rom. ii. 6, 7.

couragement from the righteousness of Christ, but those who are *sincerely* righteous, even as Christ was *perfectly* righteous: the case is plainly this; and if men mistake it, 'tis to their own peril. God of his rich mercy, and from a regard to the perfect *righteousness*, and *obedience unto death* of his well-beloved Son, has granted to the sinful children of men a covenant of *grace*; the terms and the promises of which are publish'd in the gospel: this covenant may very well be called a *covenant of grace*, as it is an instance of the undeserved *grace* or *favour* of God, that he is pleased to promise the forgiveness of all sin and eternal life and salvation to those who *repent* and *obey* the gospel: but then an *evangelical* repentance and obedience there must be; the righteousness of Christ not being more necessary, as the *foundation* of that covenant which promises the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, than our unfeigned *repentance* of all our sins, and sincere *obedience* to the precepts of the gospel are to our *interest* in God's covenant- blessings. The final judgment, as to us *christians*, will have respect to the terms of this covenant, and be regulated by them: "you lived under
" the gospel, did you obey the gospel; did
" you lead a sober, righteous, and godly life?" Here will be the inquiry, and according as we and our works shall be found to have been

been at our departure out of this world, which is the time when our probation ends, our judge will either acquit or condemn us : if we are condemned, it will not be for what we could not help, our not being absolutely elected to eternal life, but because we were *workers of iniquity* ; if we are absolv'd, it will be as bearing the character of those, to whom ^f *there is no condemnation* ; and the character of such is, *that they walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit*. If we ^t *die in the Lord*, our works will follow us ; and with regard to these our judge will say to us in the last day, ^u *well done good and faithful servants !* words which can never be applicable to those, who have no inherent righteousness of their own, or whose righteousness is as the *morning cloud*, or the *early dew*, which quickly goeth away : it could be said to such in no other way, but that of derision, *well done good and faithful servants !* Nor shall we be ever the less indebted upon this account to the mercy of God, or to the mediation of Jesus Christ ; for tho' we are to be judg'd for ^x *the things we have done in the body*, yet that we have been enabled to do these good works that God accepts, and much more that works so *imperfectly* good as ours, shall be rewarded with
eternal

^f Rom. viii. 1. ^t Rev. xiv. 13. ^u Matt. xxv. 21. ^x 2 Cor. v. 12.

eternal life, we must ascribe to the unsearchable riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ our Lord. As this is an easy and intelligible representation of the matter, so it is the very truth of the gospel; and, I will be bold to say, is the only scheme reconcileable with the perfections of God, and the declarations of his word, neither of which will admit of his saving any, who have not sincerely endeavoured to fulfil the terms of his gospel, as neither of his rejecting any who have. Hath God said, and shall he not perform? hath he declared repentance and true holiness, as well as faith in Christ, indispensable conditions of salvation, and will he confer salvation without these conditions? he would not then be *true*, he would not be *holy*, and *unchangeable* in all his perfections; that is, he would not be *God*.

THE result of all which hath been said on this general head is, that it is most certain, as certain as that the gospel is from God, and that God is holy, and just, and true, that *ineffective* purposes of amendment, *unsuccessful* attempts to become good, which leave men in the same state they were in before, will *not be accepted* by God instead of *true repentance* and *holiness* of life. Let us therefore now proceed,

III. To consider what *method* we should take, if we would not only make some entrance

trance upon the ways of religion, but *go on in them*, and *hold out to the end*. And here these directions among others, are proposed to your most serious and deliberate thoughts : and may God give them their desir'd efficacy !

I. IF we would not have our goodness or religion to be an imperfect temporary thing, let us with all the care we are able avoid the errors before-mentioned. Are there those who miscarry for want of *seriously and distinctly* considering the *nature* of that *change* upon which they resolve ; the *reasons* for it, and the *time* and *pains* it will cost to effect it ? then let us enter into the serious consideration of all these things, that we may not take that for gospel-repentance and holiness which is not really so ; nor omit to consider, that the chief reasons inducing us to forsake sin, and practise holiness, are the internal hatefulness of the one, and excellence of the other : nor imagine that the work is as easily done as it is resolved, and ended as soon as it is begun ; each of which may be a stone of stumbling, occasioning our fall into everlasting perdition. Are some men but *half resolv'd* ; and is that the reason of their drawing back again ? then let our resolution be more *uniform* and *entire* : let us determine upon a life of religion, as we do upon things which we believe essential to our present interest and happiness ; that is, with
all

SER. IV. *Inconstancy in Religion.* III

all our heart ; not hesitating in the least whether we shall do the thing or no. Is it the ruin of many that they do not *watch* against those things, which they have found to be the occasions of sin, and temptations to it? then let us be warned by their fall to act more wisely, and not make our dangers and difficulties more and greater than they necessarily will be. Is it the common fault of those who do not reform their lives, that they *neglect prayer*, especially *secret* prayer, and the other instrumental duties of religion? then let us be sure to keep up those duties, and to perform them in the best manner we are able, that so honouring God, and humbly owning our dependence upon him, he may own and bless our good intentions and endeavours, and give us *grace to help us in all our times of need*. This is the first direction: if we would be *constant* in religion, let us avoid those things which are the usual occasions of *inconstancy* in this most important affair.

2. LET us give ourselves to the *frequent meditation* of those great truths on which religion is founded, such as the spiritual nature, the immortal duration, and next to infinite worth of the soul; the worthlessness of the world as to our true happiness, which must be the happiness of the soul,
the

the noblest and most durable part of ourselves, and of the body only as consistent with and consequent upon the happiness of the soul; our always acting under the eye and observation of God, and the certainty of a future judgment, when our everlasting state will be fixed according to our behaviour during this present short life. The advantage of meditating upon these things will be, that hereby they will be wrought into our very souls, as habitual principles and motives of action, which serve to counterbalance our sensual inclinations, and disarm the temptations of the world of a great part of their force: for what are those things to a soul possessed and actuated with the principles before-mentioned? Where the soul has a right notion of its value and danger, the body solicits in vain: where this world is believed to be only an introduction to one which is eternal, and is often considered in that view, the gain of the whole world, of all its wealth, and power, and pleasure, were it possible, would not be esteemed any manner of compensation for the loss or even hazard of everlasting happiness; and much less that poor pittance of pleasure or profit, which the commission of sin can at any time promise. Meditation would give a seriousness and steadiness to the mind, and dispose it for the exercise of
that

that virtue and piety which are the proper perfection, and treasure, and happiness of the soul now, and its only qualification for compleat felicity hereafter. If a religious life had nothing in itself to recommend it, yet when it was viewed in this light, it would appear a thing of infinite moment; and what every wise and reasonable person must make his choice.

3. THAT we may not be examples of the common *inconstancy* in religion, let us *often renew* our good resolutions, and arm ourselves every day before we go forth into the business and temptations of the world. We must by no means think it enough to resolve once for all, but one good resolution must be supported by another, and that by another; and especially must we take this course, while the issue of the conflict between the spirit and the flesh, between resolution and temptation, remains doubtful. " I have resolved, and I do now
 " again resolve to keep the commandments
 " of God. In the morning let me say to
 " myself, possibly I shall meet with temp-
 " tations to such and such sins this day, I
 " will therefore now arm myself against
 " them; as by *prayer to God* that he would
 " keep me, so by *purposes* of watchfulness
 " and resistance. Let me think what sort
 " of conduct and behaviour will afford
 " me most satisfaction when I reflect upon
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“ it in the close of the day, and much more
 “ at the close of life, and wisely resolve
 “ upon such a conduct ; in what way may
 “ I glorify God, redeem my time, and
 “ fulfil the duties of the several relations in
 “ which I stand.” With such thoughts and
 resolutions let us begin the day ; and in the
 progress of it raise our minds to God in
 short ejaculations as we have need, and in-
 vitation, and opportunity. The time we
 spend in this manner must be according to
 our circumstances, and as the necessity of
 our case shall require.

4. LET us bend our *chief force* against
those sins which do most easily beset, and most
 frequently overcome us. Our success against
 these will facilitate the conquest of others,
 and be the best mark of our proficiency in
 religion ; for then may we conclude our-
 selves to be ** upright before God, when we*
keep ourselves from our own iniquity : whereas
 when our zeal principally shows itself against
 other sins, to which we are not so prone, and
 from which consequently we can refrain
 without much self-denial, we shall be apt
 to think our triumph over these a compleat
 victory over the body of sin, give our most
 dangerous enemy time and opportunity to
 enslave us, and thus be far from the king-
 dom of heaven, when we foolishly ima-
 gine that we are just entering it. All sin in-
 deed

* Psal. xviii. 23.

deed must be mortified and subdued; and provided we bring under those sins, and break through those vicious habits by which we have been again and again led captive, and shall be so till we exert our utmost endeavours against them; there is no great fear of our not going on prosperously against our other sins. Can I prevail with myself to sacrifice my most darling lusts, which are become a second nature to me? and is it to be supposed I should then be unwilling to part with other sins to which I am much less inclined? and if I cannot prevail with myself to do the former of these, 'tis to little purpose that I do the latter. Here then let us, point our strongest batteries, where our enemy is strongest; at the same time not neglecting any part where there is the least danger: and by this, among other things, let us judge of our progress in the duties of repentance, even by the ground we gain upon our most beloved sins; not thinking ourselves to be made free from sin, till the reign of these sins is dissolved and broken. Could men be persuaded to take this method, their goodness would not be such a fluctuating thing, as it is now too generally.

5. LET us frequently make this reflection, that while we spend our time in trifling thus with religion, *life* not only *goes on*, but

goes off too, and death approaches. We shall not always have opportunity thus to play the fool: let us fear, lest our *righteousness* being as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, one day after another, should be the same when our last day comes. Can any of us say how near that may be? " O my soul! " thou knowest that time and tide stay for " no man; that the time of thy trial is " both short and uncertain: and what is " the instruction I am to learn from hence? " why this, that I will no more return to " my sins, because every time I do so, I " hazard my being surprized by death in " a state of sin, which is what I should " dread more than any worldly loss or affliction, and consequently do every thing " in my power to prevent. Alas! is life, " my only time of probation, so short, and " to me so utterly uncertain? does every " week, and day, and hour steal away " something from it, till in a very little " while, perhaps in much less than I imagine, the whole is exhausted? Well then, " I see clearly what is my interest, as well " as my duty: and having so clear a view " of it, I cannot be satisfied any longer to " neglect it, or to mind it only by halves. " I am resolved to be *happy for ever*, since " God puts it to my choice, whether I will " be so or not; and to be *holy*, since with-

" out

“ out being holy, I cannot be happy ; and
 “ from this time to begin, if I have not
 “ yet begun it, a life of holiness, and to
 “ continue in it : since if I still delay, or
 “ which is little better, am inconstant in it,
 “ perpetually varying my conduct and be-
 “ haviour, death may come and fix my
 “ character and condition for ever amongst
 “ the enemies of God and religion. A con-
 “ sideration so dreadful, that as I cannot
 “ bear the thought, so by the grace of God,
 “ I am determined not to run the hazard of
 “ it.”

AND now let us all be persuaded to reflect every one for himself, what interest we have in this subject, *whether*, and *how far* it concerns us. The subject before us is the *inconstancy* of mankind in *religion* : we are men naturally liable to the same follies, passions, and mistakes, both in thinking and practice as others. The importance of this subject is not to be denied, as it relates to *religion*, and that to our *highest interest* and *happiness*. Perhaps upon serious reflection, some, not to say many of us will, see too much reason to charge themselves with *inconstancy* in those things, which are preparatory to the *essential* part of religion ; while others will not be able to acquit themselves altogether, as to what is *gradual* and

perfective. I shall beg leave to address myself to both these sorts of persons.

MUST you, after impartial examination, be forced to own, that tho' you have taken some steps in the way to heaven, yet you have not gone so far as to be qualified and entitled to that future blessedness, going backwards and forwards, doing and undoing; sometimes resolved, and at other times unresolv'd; now swimming against the stream of your corrupt affections, now carried away by it? this is what I call being *inconstant* in things preparatory to the *essential* part of religion; for it is of the essence of religion, that you have a prevailing habit of goodness establish'd in your souls. This you have been aiming at, and have done something towards it, but nothing to any purpose: you are not yet *pass'd from death to life*, from a state of servitude into a state of liberty; you have been now and then making some struggles towards the new birth, and coldly endeavouring to recover your liberty; but after all, are but where you were at first. Here let me intreat you to weigh these three or four considerations, additional to what have been mentioned already; possibly they may be of some use to convince you of the absurdity of your conduct, and to make you alter it. God grant they may!

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I. CONSIDER that you *have all the difficulty* without the *benefit* of a thorough reformation of heart and life; nay, you may take more pains in this case, than you would do in breaking off at once from your sins: for, as I observ'd before, the main difficulty when a man betakes himself to a new way of life, is at the beginning. At first his lusts are stronger, as it must needs be after they have been long indulged and fed; whereas when they have been for some time restrained and cut short, they become feebler. Now, you, Sirs, are so unhappy as to be always beginning; by which means your difficulties are never at an end, nor at all lessened. You are like persons who designing a journey to a certain place, should set out on it, and go a good part of the way, which was more unpleasant, and then return again, and thus continue going and returning. Is it not certain, that such persons create themselves a deal of needless trouble, and take it all together, suffer more toil and weariness, than those who travel on till they come to their journey's end? It is not long before these last get beyond the most steep and rugged part of the road; after which they advance with more speed and pleasure. And methinks this is such a consideration, as persons who love their own ease so much, should not over-look.

You have begun well, and why will you not go on? if you go back again, all you will get by it, will be the trouble of beginning all a-new; and supposing you should often do this, the difficulties and hardships you must endure, placed all together, will amount to more than those of the christian, who has gotten the victory over his irregular affections: henceforward he has no other concern, but to combat with the *comparatively* feeble remains of sin, and to hold fast what he has gotten; while you, alas! by suffering your enemy to take breath, and recruit again, must encounter him a second or a third time, perhaps much oftener, in his full strength. And can any thing be more foolish and unadvised than this? For your own sakes act otherwise; you will thus save your selves a great deal of uneasiness, and painful struggling. Why should you labour in vain; as all that labour is in vain, which is quitted before it hath answered its end?

2. CONSIDER that you can have *no real satisfaction* in your present course: what satisfaction can there possibly be in acting at the unaccountable rate you do? The man who forsakes his sins, and keeps the commandments of God, has great peace and satisfaction of mind, from a consciousness of his doing what is right in it-
self,

self, and pleasing to God : every conquest he obtains over himself, and over the world, brings him in fresh pleasure ; but what room is there for pleasure, where a person is for so little a time of the same mind ? before his new course of life can yield him any satisfaction, he forsakes it again, and returns to his old follies and vices. There is no doubt the fruit is as the tree it grows on, good, if that be good ; but then there must be time for it to grow and ripen : whereas this changeable generation of men will not wait for that time. From righteousness would naturally spring peaceable and pleasant fruits ; but such is their folly, that they quickly pluck up what they had planted, or let it die in the ground for want of culture. Here then no pleasure can be reasonably expected : on the contrary, such a variable and irrational conduct as theirs, has no other tendency but to fill them with inward vexation and uneasiness ; it being impossible that a reasonable creature should receive any satisfaction from the reflection upon his having acted unreasonably. I believe it may be said, generally speaking, that the person who hangs in suspense between virtue and vice, betwixt a religious life and the contrary, is in a more uneasy situation of mind than another who is fixed in a vicious life. A state of irresolution is itself a state very disagreeable

agreeable to the mind of man, and puts it to no little pain ; and, besides this, every time a man thinks on his ways, and exercises some acts of repentance, his conscience being awake, and stung with the sense of his guilt and folly, he feels that disquietude and anguish, to which the hardened sinner is a stranger. And as his conscience thus sleeps and wakes by turns, he has only intervals of ease, his conscience not remaining awake long enough to attain a settled peace. As often as he reflects upon his past life, and takes up resolutions of acting after another manner, his mind accuses him of the many aggravated transgressions of which he has been guilty, and reproaches him with the folly of having only resolv'd, or begun to live like a reasonable creature, and a christian ; but never actually done it : so that in this respect, he has a more wretched life of it, than the sinner who goes on his way without ever thinking whither it leads, or turning aside from it for a moment. And is it consistent with common sense and reason, to continue in this wavering and contradictory estate ? should I not fix at last, out of regard to my own peace ? not in the ways of sin, because the end of that peace is heaviness and everlasting confusion ; but in my choice of a religious life, the peace of which is pure, *passeth all understanding*, and
is

is followed with everlasting rest and happiness.

3. CONSIDER every time you return to your sins, after you have resolved to forsake them, and begun to do it, you make your condition *worse* than it was before. The heart being a little softened, and then losing that softness, is harder than at first : you contract an habit of trifling in the most important affair in the whole world ; so that the *second* time you break your good resolutions with less scruple than the *first*, and the *third* than the *second*, and so on, unless there happens to be some extraordinary circumstance which prevents it : and consequently the longer a man has kept on in this course, now personating the good man, then acting the bad, which is properly his own person, the less hope there is that he will ever be truly wise, and in good earnest apply himself to the business of his salvation. Ordinarily speaking, his resolutions every time he takes up new ones, and his endeavours in pursuance of these, will be weaker ; and by that means a relapse more easy, and the temptations to it harder to be resisted. Would to God you would consider this ! it highly deserves to be considered by you. Did you consider it as you should, it must have some influence upon you. “ Is my danger, when least, so dreadfully great ? and
“ shall

“ shall I increase it ? Increase it I do, by al-
“ lowing my self in such a trifling temper,
“ and making a custom of breaking through
“ all my most serious vows and purposes.
“ My danger hereby is exceedingly height-
“ en’d ; and therefore, if I value my sal-
“ vation, I shall think it more than time to
“ be in earnest ; as fixed and unshaken in
“ my thoughts and resolutions of serving
“ God, and taking care of my soul, as hi-
“ therto I have been changeable and incon-
“ stant.” Let me add one thing more,

4. CONSIDER in what light your pre-
sent manner of acting will appear to you,
when you come *to die*, and in the *state after*
death : will you not then apprehend it to
be the most egregious folly ? will it not be
the occasion of the most cutting remorse and
displeasure with yourselves ? “ O fool that
“ I have been ! will you cry out, or have
“ reason to cry out when death approaches.
“ How have I spent my life ? how foolish-
“ ly ? how inconsistently ? I have seen my
“ duty, been convinced of my interest,
“ otherwise I should never have troubled
“ my self about seeking after any other
“ happiness than the world afforded, nor
“ by any other way than that to which my
“ inclinations led me. I have been sensible,
“ that my true happiness did not consist in
“ the gratifications of sense, or the enjoyments
“ and

“ and possessions of the world. Alas! to
 “ how little purpose; when all the effect has
 “ been that I have taken a step or two
 “ towards my true felicity, and then have
 “ grown indifferent to it again, and
 “ acted quite inconsistent with it? Ah!
 “ what fruit have I now of all my ineffec-
 “ tive resolutions, and weak endeavours?
 “ After all, I find my self destitute of any
 “ rational hope of future happiness to sup-
 “ port me in my dying agonies; of the
 “ good I have done, or rather resolved to
 “ do, nothing remains at the foot of the ac-
 “ count: but, alas! all the evil, having
 “ never been thoroughly repented of, re-
 “ mains uncanceled; and I have a bur-
 “ den lying upon my soul, which presses
 “ it down, so that it cannot mount, or even
 “ look upwards to the regions of light and
 “ immortality, with any prospect of having
 “ its portion there. And now what have I
 “ to look for, but the dreadful reward of
 “ my iniquities in the punishments of that
 “ state, upon which with a trembling heart
 “ and unspeakable amazement, I am just
 “ entering?” And after the soul is dislodg’d
 from its body, and finds its condition to
 be even worse than its fears, then its guilt
 and folly appear in a still more aggrava-
 ting view. ” O wretch that I am, and
 “ ever shall be! I might have been hap-
 “ py!

“ py ! I resolv’d that I would be so ! and
“ yet I am miserable ; because I did not re-
“ solve with that firmness, or pursue my
“ resolutions with that constancy which were
“ necessary ! and now nothing is left for
“ me, miserable soul, but to curse my stupid
“ folly, and despair of that happiness which
“ was once within my reach, but will never
“ be so more ! I came near the kingdom of
“ heaven, was just at the gate, ready to
“ flatter my self that I was about to enter ;
“ and must I be shut out ? I must - - - and
“ justly ; since the glorious prize itself, and
“ the only terms upon which it was to be
“ obtain’d, were both of them plainly reveal-
“ ed to me, and I was frequently invited, and
“ did even resolve to put in for it ; and yet
“ by one temptation or pretence or other,
“ was hindred from vigorously prosecuting
“ this my highest concern. I was often told
“ what would be the issue, and what the tor-
“ menting reflections I should make when it
“ was too late. Dreadful was the represen-
“ tation made of this state, which I now find
“ to be far exceeded by my present feeling.”

UPON the whole then, let us consider
these things, and others which would offer,
if we look’d for them, and be wise. Let
those whose *goodness* has been as *the morning*
cloud, and *the early dew*, which go away, be
more constant, stedfast, and immoveable.

Let

Let us not rest in any change short of one which is universal and permanent. Let us labour to have a lively sense of our duty, and our interest ; the danger we are in of mis-carrying, without a great deal of care ; and the irreparable loss we shall sustain if we do. Let us humbly cast ourselves on the mercy of God, and earnestly entreat him for his goodness sake in Jesus Christ, to have compassion upon us ; and by his *grace* so to establish our hearts, that having *chosen the good part*, we may never relinquish it. Let us morning and evening pray to God in the best manner we are able ; and every day, and all the day long, *walk circumspectly, redeeming our time*, and acting as those who regard the salvation of their souls as their chief concern. Let us persevere in this course, and we shall in time find the advantage of it, and have the pleasure resulting from a life of true piety and obedience, as an evident proof of the sincerity of our repentance ; which, next to the pleasure of innocence, is the greatest in the whole world.

I SHOULD now pass on to the other part of my address ; which is to those whose conduct is not wrong in any *essential* or necessary part, and yet, not altogether such as it should be. But this I shall reserve for another discourse.



S E R M O N V.

Instances of Inconstancy in good
Men.

H O S E A vi. 4.

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

IN treating these words, I have,

I. CONSIDER'D the *causes* of this wretched *inconstancy* in religion.

II. THE *certainty* that these *ineffective* purposes of amendment, these *mere beginnings* and *unsuccessful* attempts to become good, will not be accepted instead of *true repentance* and *holiness of life*. And,

III. THE

III. THE *method* we should take if we would not only make some entrance upon the ways of religion, but go on in them, and hold out to the end.

I AM now to address my self to those whose conduct is not wrong in any *essential* or *necessary* part, and yet not altogether so *constantly* and *uniformly* religious as it should be. The persons here meant, are sincere christians, upright before God as to the main; so that it cannot be said of them in the same sense as those before-mentioned, *that their goodness is as the morning cloud, and the early dew*: since their good resolutions have produced an *actual* and *lasting* change, and they now belong to another society and denomination of men: and yet there is a sense in which their goodness too is frequently variable and *inconstant*; not as if there was a *total* change, but in respect to the *degree*. They are not so steady and uniform as they might be; and instead of advancing forward, *draw back*, tho' not *to perdition*. It may be of use to assign some *instances* of this mutability of persons of sincere piety, in which they change for the worse. I shall name some of the most frequent and remarkable.

I. GOOD men are too apt to change as to their *diligence* and *activity* in the christian life. Once, perhaps, they were full of vigour,

and ran the *race that was set before them* with great alacrity : instead of which happy liveliness and unwearied industry in the practice of religion, a sluggishness and indolence of temper seizeth them ; by means of which they drag on heavily, and are ready to say of that which gave them very great pleasure, *what a weariness is it ?* They are bewitch'd with the charms of ease and indolence, grow remiss in working out their salvation ; and whereas they were formerly *ⁱ fervent in spirit*, are dull, and lifeless, and indifferent : like the tired traveller, who sits or lies down to rest himself, and then is more indispos'd and unable to pursue his journey than before ; his hands hang down, his knees are feeble, his joints stiff and unpliant, and nothing now is more ungrateful than to quit his place, and put himself in motion. Sometimes this inactivity proceeds from a disorder of the *body*, and in that case calls for the divine pity, not displeasure : nor will God impute that for a crime, which is only an infelicity. But they have no such plea to make for themselves, whose minds are active enough in every thing else but religion. The indisposition and disability under which such persons labour, are what they have brought upon themselves ; being the effect of a too great avocation from the affairs of their souls,

ⁱ Rom. xii. 11.

souls, and difuse of holy meditation, and the like. They have been too careful, and too deeply ingag'd, it may be, in their earthly concerns, and this hath made them idle in their most important affairs: as idleness has bred sloth, and the less they have been accustomed to labour and action, the greater aversion they have for them. This temper creeps upon them by insensible degrees: at first they relax their care and industry but a little; then a little more, and so more and more, till they have contracted an habit of sloth and inactivity, which leaves them no heart *to strive, wrestle, and fight*: all which are scripture metaphors representing the necessity of taking pains in religion. And hereby it comes to pass, that their actions of a religious kind are less agreeable to themselves, and less acceptable to God: they make little or no progress in the ways of piety; the increase they bring forth, and the grace they receive is inconsiderable. And no wonder, *since the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.* They desire to be *enriched in all things through Christ Jesus*, and are not, because their desires are too faint to raise their active powers, and to make them use the endeavours necessary for the acquisition of these invaluable blessings.

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2. HATH

^z Prov. xiii. 4.

2. HATH the time been when the christian was *vigilant* and *circumspect*? one would think the advantages he must have reaped from hence should have kept him so; and yet they do not always effect it. He is liable to slide into another temper, and to be strangely inattentive to his spiritual interest: and this inattention of soul, as it is nearly a-kin to the sluggishness before-mentioned, so is almost an inseparable companion of it. *Instinct* teaches brute creatures to watch for their preservation; *reason* teaches men the same lesson; and *grace*, as well as reason, the christian. But, alas, the christian does not always listen to this divine monitor! a spirit of slumber overtakes him, and he is too careless, tho' not absolutely void of all care in the matters of his salvation: his mind and heart are upon other things; the cares of this life fill his heart; present things amuse and divert him, so that other and better objects are in some respect and degree as if they were not: the enemies of his soul steal upon him, and he observes it not: he has opportunities of promoting his highest interest, and observes it not: there are disorders in his heart, if not his life, and he observes them not: time passes away, and eternity draws nigh, and he observes it not. The consequence of which is, that his enemies get ground upon him; opportunities escape him; the
same

same faults continue unamended, with the addition of new ones : he loses the good he overlooks, and falls into the evils he does not foresee : and once this inadvertency becomes habitual, it is not presently shaken off. ^a *While the bridegroom tarried, the wise virgins slumber'd and slept* : the christian gives way to slumber, and then falls asleep : and while he ^b *sleeps, the enemy comes and soweth his tares* : the weeds of evil customs and inclinations spring up, he forgets God and himself, his duty and his danger ; he hears not the still voice of the Spirit, hardly the louder calls of the word and of providence. In vain are the instructions and admonitions of providence, if he does not attend to them ; in vain his near concern in the word heard or read, when his mind is in a great measure absent, and he takes but slight notice of it. How long do some christians continue in this state, and, during all this time, how little, as to the power and life of religion, do they differ from other men.

3. THERE may be the loss, as to the good man's *conscience*, of its former *sensibility* and *authority*. Not that his conscience is laid asleep, and that he acts without any regard to right and wrong ; but he does not discover altogether the same tenderness he once did. Conscience is a kind of *inward*

K 3

sense^a Matt. xxv. 5.^b Matt. iii. 25.

sense and feeling of *good* and *evil* : this *sense* in all persons acquainted with the grace of God in truth, is exercised to discern between these two ; and much quicker and more pungent in them, by reason of that new and higher principle which is planted in their souls, than it is in any who are strangers to the *life of God*. This *sensibility* of conscience appears not so much in discovering the *nature* as the *degrees* of moral good and evil. One endowed with this happy tenderness of conscience, is not only sensible that sin is a great evil, but the greatest of all evils ; not only that this or that action is sinful, but in what rank of sins it is to be number'd. Hence the least sin comes to be offensive to it, grates upon it, causes a fear and dread when proposed in the temptation, and a great deal of pain and disquietude when the temptation is complied with. And the reason is, that no sin appears *little* to a tender conscience, tho' one sin may not appear as great as another. How much more must such a conscience startle at a temptation to more heinous sins ? Blessed is the man who hath this inward *sense* in the greatest perfection ! it being greatly preferable to the highest elevation of the speculative understanding without it. Such a man will be more afraid of sin, than of the worst enemy he can have in the world besides : the appearance of it will alarm him, and
put

put him upon his guard, and the remains of sin in him will be his continual burden: he will be frequent in the exercises of godly sorrow and humiliation, and with transports of soul adore the riches of the divine mercy, which pardons his sins, and delivers him from the slavery and pollution of them. How careful then should we be to maintain this *sensibility* and *tenderness* of conscience, when it has so many advantages attending it, especially, when without this care it is liable to decay and become languid. Let me consider, that my conscience may become less tender; and that this is no *improbable* supposition, or a supposition of a thing merely possible, but not at all likely. How many christians who once walked with the utmost caution, were exact in their conversation, concerned lest they should defile their garments with the least spot, *detesting* the *evil ways* of sinners, as much as they *compassionated* their *persons*, have in time, and by little and little grown more familiar with temptation, had less pity for the sinner, and less hatred of his sinful practices,, have been less afflicted at the strength of their irregular passions and inclinations, less grieved for their sins, and thought those things very pardonable of which they had once a quite different notion, not because their consciences are more

enlighten'd, but less *tender*? which should persuade us to be very cautious that we do not by a wrong management of ourselves, by offending against conscience in the least point, and treating *real* tenderness as *mere* scrupulosity, wound our conscience, dull its eye, and blunt its edge and feeling.

WITH the *sensibility* of conscience is connected its *power*. The conscience which has little tenderness, will not have much *authority*; and if it has but little authority, 'tis a sign it has not much tenderness. And how often does this *authority* of conscience decline, even in good men? Time was, when it never spoke, but it was heard and obey'd: now, perhaps, unless it be in cases where the whole evidence of a man's being in a state of salvation would be shaken; that is, where the sin is of a deeper and blacker die, conscience does not exert itself to restrain him; and so where the restraint is weak, 'tis not to be wonder'd at, if the temptation prove too strong for it. Are none of us able to say, that this has been sometimes our case? that conscience has not been able to make head against temptations, with the same success as it once could do? that we have been more easily overcome by our enemy, especially if the onset has been any thing violent? Upon *comparing our-*
selves

selves with ourselves, which is sometimes a wise action, we may know whether what has been said describes our condition at any time : and therefore we shall do well to make this comparison, that we may not neglect to oppose a growing evil, till it be gone too far to be corrected without a great deal of difficulty.

4. HATH the christian *disengaged* himself to a great degree from the *affections* of the *lower* life? he is very happy herein, but let him not be secure, as if he was not liable to a change. By the *lower* life, I mean the life of *sense*, this bodily and earthly life, which has its affections distinct from that higher and diviner life, begun, and cherished by the grace of the gospel. Among these *affections* of the *lower* life, which are never extinguished in the most perfect christians, and sometimes prevail too much, I would particularize a few.

1. *ADMIRATION* and *esteem* of *worldly* things ; of the pomp, and greatness, and wealth, which the world sets before them : not that they make these things their *portion*, or to gain any of them can consent to *hazard* eternal blessedness ; but whereas in some moments they have had a sort of contempt for them, and pitied the minds which were caught in this snare ; they have now
too

too *high* ideas of them. The false glitter of these things dazzles their eyes, and they are thus hinder'd from seeing their emptiness and worthlessness so clearly as they would otherwise do. When they seriously reflect, and compare things together, they make a truer judgment, acknowledge 'tis all a show, without any thing substantial to support it; and admire their own folly in putting so high a value upon what is really deserving very little regard in the view of a sound mind. Thus it is, when the christian, in his *retirements*, has the possession of his own understanding, is free and unbiass'd, and soberly examines all those things for which the world is idolized by the multitude; he can then heartily despise them in comparison of his nobler hopes. But are there not times when his judgment is not altogether so unprejudiced? when the scale, which has the world in it, weighs heavier than it used to do? when what the scripture calls *the fashion of the world*, the scheme and appearance of earthly things, imposes upon him, and steals his approbation? at such moments he can hardly forbear envying those who are in a more exalted condition, and calling the rich happy, because *rich*: he can hardly forbear concluding, that providence has been kinder to them than to himself.

self. This *envy* of the rich and great, however disguised under other names, betrays an undue esteem of earthly things. And can the christian say, he is always free from these emotions of mind? he has then attained to an higher pitch of virtue, in this respect at least, than the *Psalmist*, who confesses himself, that ^d *he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked*: tho' 'tis true, he afterwards reduced his judgment to the right poize, by *going into the sanctuary of God*; that is, by viewing things in the light of religion, which made him understand that *the end* of bad men would be miserable, whatever show they at present made.

2. *LOVE* of *sensual pleasure* is another affection of the *lower* life; which, in some intervals, grows upon the christian. Instead of that lively relish of spiritual joys, which, it may be, he was once so happy as to possess, he has now too quick a relish of earthly delights: is ready to account those the best circumstances of life, which afford the most frequent opportunity of gratifying the senses; and those the most fortunate men, who tread in a circle of diversion and amusements; and as one pleasure goes off, have another to succeed it. This is a temptation to which *younger* christians, those in the prime and the vigour of their

^d Psal. lxxiii. 3, 17,

their days are most subject. And dost thou, in thy sober judgment, think *they* are possess'd of that happiness, which all men are enquiring after, *who spend their days in mirth, and in a moment go down to the grave?* This cannot be the judgment of any true christian: *grace* has rectified the opinion and the taste of every such person more than this; and yet I fear, tho' it be not the *stated* character of any truly good person to be a *lover of pleasure*, the love of it at certain times revives more than it ought to do. At such times the christian cannot find in his heart to resist the stream with his whole might, but suffers himself to be carried down by it a little. And does he not see the reason of it, that the love of sensual pleasure is founded in the body, and is consequently cherished and inflamed by bodily indulgences? would he therefore subdue this dangerous affection; let him *keep under the body*; *crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts*, and be always afraid of drinking too deep, when he tastes of the enchanted cup.

3. *IMMODERATE hopes and fears, joy and sorrow about present things, are affections belonging to the lower life, from which the christian is not wholly privileged.*
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^e Job xxi. 13.
27.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 4.
Gal. v. 24.

^z 1 Cor. ix.

He is sometimes so free from them as not to have his mind exceedingly disturbed, and put out of possession of itself by them ; but he is too changeable in this respect : he does not always follow the ⁱ apostle's advice with regard to these things, to *rejoice as if he rejoiced not, and weep as if he wept not* : on the contrary, he rejoices and weeps as if he had forgotten there were other objects of joy and sorrow infinitely more considerable than these. 'Tis really astonishing to observe how extreamly some good people, as we must in charity believe them, are apt to be moved by the trivial occurrences of this life, whether grateful or otherwise ; now lifted up, now cast down ; transported out of themselves upon the accomplishment of their wishes, or the arrival of some unexpected good ; or almost sunk into dejection and despair upon some worldly loss and disappointment. How unseemly is such an excess of these passions in a *reasonable* creature ? how much more unseemly in a *christian* ? If thou *art not of the world*, as thou *professest* not to be of it, why dost thou rejoice and grieve like the men of the world ? They could hardly do worse whose passions are wholly taken up about these things ; whereas thou believest the existence of other things, and *professest* to have joys and

ⁱ 1 Cor. vii. 30.

and sorrows of a very different kind ; as also other hopes and fears : the hope of the favour of God, and the fear of his displeasure ; hope of ^k *entring into his heavenly and everlasting rest*, and fear lest thou *shouldest come short of it*. And what is the meaning then of thy being tofs'd with restless hopes and fears about the events of this life ? that thy hopes are so badly governed, as to be almost as troublesome and disquieting as thy fears ? Such inordinate hopes and fears are not only *disquieting* but *sinful*, and therefore sinful because disquieting. It may be thought they are punishment enough of themselves ; and so far is true, that they are a sore punishment : but as by distracting the mind, they incapacitate it for the duties to which we are called by our christian profession, there is a great deal of guilt in them ; which is a good argument for watchfulness against them.

4. *INTEMPERATE anger*, or a proneness to kindle into warm resentments upon very *trivial* occasions, is a fault with which some good men are too chargeable. If they exercise some guard upon this passion, and are sometimes watchful over themselves, not to offend by indecent sallies of it, yet this part of their goodness is not lasting ; they are in the end weary of opposing a violent temper,

^k Heb. iv. 1.

temper, and so let *nature* have its way, to the disgrace of *religion*. ¹ *Be ye angry, and sin not*, is a precept which they do not seem to remember. Their anger is such, that they *sin* in being angry after *such* a manner; and being angry in such a manner, they are guilty of other sins: their *anger itself* is a sin, as it breaks over the bounds of reason and religion, which allow us not to be ^m *angry without a cause*, or *beyond* the merits of it: nor, be the cause and pretence what it will, to be angry in such a degree as to lose the command of ourselves; when we come to cool a little, we shall find more reason to be angry with *ourselves*, than we had to fall out with *others*. We should take care how we permit a peevish, fretful temper to grow upon us, lest this make way for more boisterous passions; and then, out of a foolish shame of acknowledging a fault, we go on justifying one fit of passion by another, 'till we have contracted a wretched habit, of which we shall find it difficult to cure ourselves. And that which should encrease our care in this matter is, the consideration that as immoderate anger is itself a sin, so, when we are under the power of this passion, we expose ourselves to the danger of committing other sins; reason and religion, which are the only restraints

¹ Eph. iv. 26.^m Matt. v. 22.

straints from them in times of violent temptation, being then too much disregarded. Oh, what work do some men in their passions make for after-repentance and humiliation! --- This is the fourth instance in which the goodness of true christians is too mutable, viz. their *disengagement* from, and *government* over the *affections* of the lower life, such as *admiration* and *esteem* of worldly things; the *love* of *sensual pleasure*; *immoderate hopes* and *fears*, *joys* and *sorrows* about *present* occurrences; and *intemperate anger*.

5. A *spirit* of *devotion* is not *always kept up*. How devout is the christian sometimes in comparison of himself at other times? His pious affections ascend at one time as incense, with a strong gale to heaven; at another time vanish away like *the morning cloud*, and *the early dew*. His *indivotion* discovers itself in two or three instances; in a *disuse* of *religious* thoughts and contemplations; in the *little pleasure* which the *duties* and *exercises* of religion afford him; and in the *decay* of his *desires* after spiritual and eternal blessings.

1. His *indivotion* appears in his *disuse* of *religious* thoughts and contemplations, in which time was, when he more frequently employed himself. Those great and glorious things which the gospel reveals, have
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been

been the subject of his serious and close meditations ; he in a manner *gave himself to these things*, not a day past without these devout entertainments ; his appetite to them returned as to his necessary food ; his soul would often take wing, leave the world and the body, soar aloft in heavenly contemplations, dwell upon the perfections of God, the love of Jesus, the happiness of the saints under the protection of their heavenly Father, and especially in his immediate presence. Besides his stated seasons for such thoughts, they would mingle with his other thoughts, and at once regulate and refine them : his thoughts of holy and heavenly objects were an excellent preservative from evil and vain thoughts, and he could much more easily govern the motions of his mind, when he was used to exercise it in this christian manner. When he found such great advantage in these divine meditations, why would he intermit them ? why, upon any pretence, would he excuse himself from them ? Let him think what he has lost hereby ; of what satisfaction and peace he has deprived himself ; the disinclination to such exercises, which has sprung up from the disuse of them. Seldom now does he think of God, and Christ, and heavenly things : his thoughts presently start aside from such objects : the traces these thoughts

had formerly worn, are now as it were stopp'd up, so that he can hardly find his way to them; and from the beginning of the day to the end of it, and one day after another, thoughts of a very different nature and influence crowd his mind, and take up his attention. Methinks, as soon as the christian discovers himself to be fallen into such a way, he should be so concerned at it, as to have no rest 'till he recovered his former acquaintance and familiarity with the things of God.

2. A SPIRIT of *indevotion* shows itself in the *little pleasure* which christians take in the *duties* and *exercises* of *religion*; when they are ready to say of the worship of God, *what a weariness is it!* when they come to the house of God, and to the table of the Lord, because they cannot satisfy themselves in staying away, not for any great satisfaction they have in being there; when they pray, and hear, and communicate, but with a languor of affection, which in a great part destroys the end of those duties. This decay of devotion is a different thing from a lowness of the animal spirits, and disorders of body, which ought by no means to be confounded with it. The time will come when every saint will be *ισαγγελος*,^a *equal to the angels*, but at present we are short

^a Luke xx. 36.

short of this angelical perfection. The body weighs down the soul, and through some obstruction or other in the organs, disables it for lively and chearful action ; but far be it from me to call this *indevotion*. Indevotion is not an affection of the *body*, but of the *mind* ; the body performing its part as well as at other times. How often is the christian all life and warmth in the business, and conversations, and diversions of the world, and altogether as cold and lifeless in religion ? how often does he receive too much pleasure from earthly enjoyments, when he receives very little from the employments of devotion ? This, I doubt, too well deserves the name of a *criminal indevotion*, and is to be ascribed to some neglect and misconduct of his own.

3. *Indevotion* is attended with *want of desire* after *spiritual* and *eternal* blessings ; or if there are such desires, they are *weaker* than formerly, and not far removed from a kind of *indifference* to these things : there is not what can properly be called ° an *hungring* and *thirsting* after *righteousness* : the christian cannot say as the Psalmist, ^p *That the chased hart does not pant after the water brooks more than his soul panteth after God*. Instead of seeking God with his *whole heart*, he seeks him as if he sought him

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not.

not. I will add, that this want of *desire* is a worse sign than a want of *delight* in holy duties ; because there may be other things which hinder the soul's delight in God : as for instance, a misapprehension of our interest in him, while the decay of our desires after God, the manifestations of his favour, the aids of his spirit, and the happiness of heaven, cannot well be attributed to any thing else but our *indevotion*. In these and other particulars that might be mentioned, the goodness of true christians is often variable and inconstant : they are not so ^q *zealously affected in that which is good*, so ready to all the offices of christian benevolence, so solicitous to preserve the purity and freedom of their minds, so tenderly concerned for the honour and interest of religion, ^r so *stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*, as they should be, and as they have sometimes been. They will own that this ought not to be so, and that it is a most desirable thing to be more constant and uniform in religion ; and, instead of going back, to be, if possible, continually advancing. And that they may be thus happy, I shall, from among many *directions* which might easily be mentioned, recommend to them the two following, and conclude.

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I. FIX

^q Gal. iv. 18.^r 1 Cor. xv. 58.

I. FIX in your minds a just and lively apprehension of the *much greater peace and pleasure* which attend an *even and regular* course of piety than the *contrary*. Think what you have enjoyed when your minds have been rightly affected towards this world and the next, and your religion accompanied with life and devotion. Compared with these, all other pleasures are but as husks, or as *chaff to the wheat*, empty and tasteless, or rather nauseous and bitter. Think how much better it was with you when *you did your first works*, and were acted by your *first love*, than when you are fallen from them: then you could say from your own experience, that ^f *the ways of wisdom were ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths were peace*: then there was an established peace and friendship betwixt God and my soul; in the morning he heard my voice ascending to him, the voice of praise, thanksgiving and melody; and I heard his voice, as it were, whispering to my soul, that he had accepted me, and delighted in me: then all the day long I *walked with God*; and, as the reward of this pious frame of soul, I walked all the day long in the *light of his countenance*, and conversed after a manner on the confines of heaven: then, like the Psalmist, ^t *I was glad to hear my*

L 3

friends

^f Prov. iii. 17.^t Psal. cxxii. 1.

friends say, Come, let us go into the house of the Lord; for there I met with God in the communications of his favour: then I had ^u *this for my rejoicing, even the testimony of my conscience*, that I followed its dictates with the greatest *simplicity*, and never sought to evade my duty: then, as I brought forth more fruit, I had more joy and satisfaction; and loving the world less, was less affected with its various changes: in a word, then I delighted to do good, and was filled with delight, having done it, And this being so, shall I be so much my own enemy, as by a change of conduct to deprive my self of all this happiness? If I have done so, let me be no more guilty of this folly: what can I expect from an unequal temper of mind and behaviour, but inward shame and dissatisfaction? It cannot be thought that I should be so well established against the shocks of adversity, or prepared to pass life with that tranquillity and freedom, as I shall be if my religion become a steady lively principle of action in my soul.

2. HAVE your eye upon the *first tendencies* of the *heart* to wander from God, and *immediately* oppose and check them. 'Tis a maxim of *common prudence* in things which relate to the good estate of the body,

or our prosperous state in the world, and of *moral prudence*, with regard to the peace and order of the mind, to take notice in the very beginning, of whatever evil threatens to attack us, and to lessen our happiness in these respects, to observe it timely, that we may be able to put a timely stop to it, before it be grown to such a degree, as not to be remedied without a great deal of difficulty; and there is the same general reason why it should be a rule of *christian prudence* to be early upon our guard against those things which hinder the flourishing state of our souls in religion, divert the attention of the mind from our highest concerns, cool our affections to them, and relax the strength and vigour of our faculties. The heart may be sooner reduced again, when it is not gone far; the soul sooner regain an established health, when the least things which break in upon it, are immediately watched and provided against. Christians should take care how they dally with temptations; how they allow themselves in any liberties which may be of hurtful consequence; how they suffer themselves to be deceived by the false reasonings, and insinuating pleas of the fleshly and worldly principle, when they would in any instance turn them aside from their duty. If we give way to the solicitations

and perswasions of a sensual and earthly passion, in a single instance, we shall be more disposed to do it another time : wherefore let us beware of an inequality of conduct ; let us maintain the ground we have gotten ; keep under every irregular inclination, and cherish and comply with every good one : and then, as our goodness, so our peace too will be more established ; and we shall pass life more comfortably to ourselves, more usefully to others, and more to the glory of God, and the credit of our holy religion.





S E R M O N VI.

Jesus the holy, and anointed of God.

A C T S iv. 27.

*For of a truth against thy holy child
Jesus, whom thou hast anointed,
both Herod and Pontius Pilate,
with the Gentiles and the people
of Israel, were gathered together.*

TH E S E words are part of a prayer
offer'd to God on the following occa-
sion. - - The apostles *Peter* and *John* having
been examined before the *Jewish council*,
in relation to the *miraculous cure* of the *lame
man*, who lay at the beautiful gate of the
temple ; and being dismissed by them with
threatenings, *went to their own company*, and
*reported all that the chief priests and elders
had said unto them : and when they heard it,*
they lift up their voice to God with one ac-
cord, and said, Lord, thou art God, who
hast

hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is : who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. Prayer has been the refuge of the people of God in all generations, whatever their distresses have been, and was so of these first disciples of our blessed Saviour. That which comforted and encouraged them was, that God being the creator and governor of the whole world, the true religion, with all the sincere professors and teachers of it, must be continually under his care : so that whatever opposition their Master had met with, or might at any time be raised against his cause and interest, it was not without *permission* of a wise Providence ; nay, was no more than had been *foretold*, and had in part happened before to *David*, the *man after God's own heart*, and one of the most illustrious *types* of the *Messiah*, at his advancement to the throne ; in which he was not thoroughly settled, till after many

many years struggle with foreign and domestic enemies.

IN the words of the text we may observe these two things, both of them highly worthy our most serious meditations.

I. THE *character* of our blessed Lord; he is here called *God's holy child, whom he had anointed.*

II. THE *reception* he met with from the world. Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against him. Princes and people, Jews and Heathen, Pharisees and Sadducees; persons of every rank, of every religion, of every sect, joined in this wicked confederacy.

I. LET us observe the *character* of the blessed Jesus. This may be distinguished into *publick* and *personal*: considered in his *publick* character he was the *anointed son or servant of God*; his *personal* character is implied in the appellation of *holy*, which is here given him.

I. CONSIDER'D in his *publick* character, he was the *anointed son or servant of God*; for the Greek word *παιδα* has both these significations: and no farther back than the 25th verse is translated *servant, Who by the mouth of thy servant David*; where the original

original word is the same with that rendered *child* in the text : and in different senses Christ was truly both a *son* and a *servant*. He was a *servant*, and approved himself *faithful*, in that ^a *he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him*. And tho' it is seldom that he is called a *servant*, because the title is not sufficiently distinguishing ; yet we cannot say that he is never so called : not to insist upon the text, the prophet *Isaiah* thus styles him ^b, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth*. He is styled the *son of God*, upon several accounts, particularly with regard to his *miraculous conception*. ^c *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God*. But since the chief emphasis is not laid upon the word *child*, or *servant*, in the text, but *anointed* ; I shall apply my self more especially to the consideration of that. This title of *anointed* has respect to our Saviour's threefold office of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*. Every one knows, who knows any thing of scripture history, that kings and priests being called of God to those offices, as were *David* and *Aaron*, were by his appointment *anointed with oil*, this being the solemn rite

^a John vi. 38.^b *Isaiah* xlii. 1.

Luke i. 35.

rite by which they were declared to be chosen of God, and set apart to his service, in these honourable functions. That *prophets* were in like manner anointed, does not appear: it is most probable that they were not, there not being the same need of it. The divine Spirit, by which the *prophets* spake, and were enabled, as often as there was occasion, to prove his commission from God by working miracles; this extraordinary gift of the Spirit was a more conspicuous mark of God's appointing the person to the office of the prophet, than any outward anointing could be; it was likewise better fitted to beget attention and respect; and upon both these accounts did abundantly supply its place. And we may suppose, it was for this reason that our Saviour had no other anointing to all his offices than this *spiritual* one: I say, for this reason, as well as to signify that his *priesthood* and *dominion* were of another nature, and of an higher order than those commonly so called; his *kingly* power and dominion being exercised over the minds and spirits of men; and his *priesthood* instituted not for the atonement of *legal*, but of *moral* guilt. The *offices* of Christ were of a *spiritual* nature, and so was his *anointing*; by this sign he was pointed out for the Messiah to his fore-

forerunner, *John the Baptist*. And ^a *John* bear record, saying, *I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove; not in the form of a dove, but gently and hovering as a dove, and I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost*. Accordingly the ^e *Spirit* did descend upon him in this visible manner at his *baptism*, which was the entrance upon his public ministry. And that he is said to be *anointed*, on account of this extraordinary communication of the Spirit to him, is plain from his own words, ^f *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; and those of St. Peter to Cornelius and his friends, - - ^g preaching peace by Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all - - whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power: or, as it is elsewhere express'd, ^h with the oil of gladness above his fellows, that is, above all other princes, he being the ⁱ King of kings, and Lord of lords*. From what has been now said, we learn the reason why our *Jesus* is stiled the *Messiah*, or the *Anointed*, by way of eminence; all these three offices of

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^a John i. 32, 33. ^e Matth. iii. 16. ^f Luke iv. 18, 21. ^g Acts x. 36, 38. ^h Heb. i. 9. ⁱ Rev. xix. 16.

prophet, priest, and king, were united in him, which we do not find they ever were in any other person. Never was there so great a *prophet*, or so great a *priest* as he: in dignity he infinitely surpasses all others: and, finally, he had the ^k *Spirit without measure*, which no one else ever had; and by this ^l *Spirit* was *declared* and manifested to be the *Son of God*, the *High-priest* of our profession, the great *Prophet* who was to come into the world, and the universal *Lord* and *King*. For all these special reasons, we may conceive our Jesus to be stiled, by way of distinction, the *Messiah*, or *Christ*; the word *Messiah* signifying *anointed*, in the *Hebrew* language, as *xpts* does in the *Greek*, from which our *English* word *Christ* is derived. We read of others who were *anointed* of God; but of no one *anointed* in that peculiar and august manner, and for those high and excellent purposes as the Son of God. ^m *He hath a name given him above every name*, being constituted ⁿ *mediator between God and man*, as a token of his *election*; to which glorious undertaking, and ample qualification for it, he was *anointed* with the *Holy Ghost*; had knowledge and power imparted to him in an inconceivable manner and degree, and was intrusted with the dispensation of all divine and heavenly gifts. Let this

^k John iii. 34.^l Rom. i. 4.^m Phil. ii. 9.ⁿ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

this little suffice at present for the explication of Christ's *public* character : and let us learn from hence to *receive* him and *submit* to him, in all these offices and relations. As the *prophet anointed* by God, we are to *bear him*, to regard his doctrines and precepts delivered in the New Testament as a *complete* rule to the christian church both of *faith* and *practice* ; not venturing to *add* to it, or *diminish* from it. We are to attend to all he delivers in the name of God, heartily to endeavour to understand it, seriously to consider it, firmly to believe whatever he reveals, and conscientiously to observe and do whatsoever he commands us. Is *Christ* of God *anointed* to be our *high-priest*, let us *receive* and *honour* him as such, drawing nigh to God in *his name*, under all our apprehensions of guilt, and in all our supplications for pardon, next to the goodness of God, making this our refuge, this our comfort and plea, that ° *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins* ; and, if we are sincere in the belief and obedience of the gospel, nothing doubting of our acceptance, at present, thro' the merits and intercession of *Jesus* our *high-priest*, of being enabled to persevere to the end, and finally receiving a most glorious and eternal recompence of reward.

reward. Farther, is *Christ of God anointed* to be our *King*; let us gladly receive, and humbly submit to him as such: let us rejoice in his government; keep his laws and ordinances; be zealously concerned for his honour and interest; remain faithful to him in the face of all danger and opposition whatsoever; endeavour, as we have opportunity, to bring back others to their duty, or establish them in it; put our trust in his protection; and look for his coming *to judge the world in righteousness*, in order to make an everlasting distinction between his friends and his enemies, his real and his pretended subjects; rewarding the one with all the marks of his favour, and with eternal life; and punishing the other with everlasting destruction from his presence.

2. WE are next to consider our Saviour's *personal* character, evidently implied in the appellation of *holy*; *Thy holy Child Jesus*. And because this is a matter of very great concernment to us, and may usefully employ our meditations, I shall open and illustrate it in some particulars.

1. THE *general* notion of *holiness* is such a *rectitude* of nature, as discovers itself in the *approbation* and *love* of every thing which is *morally* good, and excellent, and amiable; and a *dislike* of the *contrary*. Whatever being

is possessed of this *rectitude* of nature, is truly *holy*, and none besides. There may be what hath the appearance of *holiness* in the actions; but without an inward principle, it is no more than an appearance. That is *morally* good, which is so in the *judgment* of every intelligent agent; who *knows* and *considers* what is fit and becoming him to do, provided his judgment is not perverted by some wrong inclination. The apostle ° *Paul* speaks of *things that are pure, and lovely, and venerable*: and such things, without all doubt, there are; *things naturally, universally, and eternally good and beautiful*, in the excellent language of one of the most early writers of the christian church. And whenever an intellectual and free being has such an uprightness and perfection of nature, that he chuses what is good, prefers what is excellent, loves what is lovely, delights in what is pure, and both knows and does what is best; in every such being we have an example of that *holiness* which we are explaining. There must be an approbation of things excellent; this approbation must be awakened into love; this love must be superior and prevailing, and be attended with a constant delight in *holy* actions, and in the persons who do them. The more distinct and full, and the better grounded

° Phil. iv. 8.

grounded this approbation is, the more strong this love; the more intense and exalted this delight; and the more vigorous, perfect and universal the actions consonant to all these, the greater and more eminent is the degree of *holiness*. I need not add, that the *hatred* of that which is *evil*, is inseparable from the love of that which is *good*. For this reason *holiness* in the Scripture is described by both these, ^p *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*; here the expression is *positive*: ^q *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*; here the expression is *negative*: but the same excellence of nature is intended in both these expressions.

2. GOD, the first and most excellent of all beings, is the most perfectly *holy*. He is frequently celebrated by this title in the sacred writings, especially in the Old Testament; where his *holiness* is mentioned upon all occasions, by way of distinction from false Gods, to the worship of whom the people of *Israel* were too much inclined, in the times before the captivity. ^r *He is glorious in holiness*; glorious in every perfection of his most adorable nature, and therefore glorious in this; which is not so properly a *distinct* attribute, as the *combination* of all, more especially of his *moral*

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^p Psal. xi. 7. ^q Habb. j. 13. ^r Exod. xv. 11.

attributes, *his justice, goodness, truth, and faithfulness*; which, when we would comprise them in one *single* term, we call the divine *rectitude*, or *holiness*. The *holiness* of God is so transcendently great, so far beyond any thing which bears that name among created beings, that it may be truly said, [†] *there is none holy as the Lord*. In the same sense our blessed Saviour tells us, [†] *there is none good but one, that is God*: he alone is *holy* and *good* in the supreme degree; no *created* understanding has that comprehensive view of the natures of things and actions, and the degrees of good and evil, of fitness and unfitness, amiableness and deformity in each; nor has any *created will* that firm and unmoveable adherence to good, and aversion to evil: both these being infinite, the extent of his wisdom, and the vital activity of his will, his *holiness*, or delight in what is suitable to his most excellent nature, must be the same. It is as impossible, in the *event*, that God should do an *unholy* action, or approve it in any of his creatures, as that he should cease to be God. For this reason, when St. Paul would express the immutable faithfulness of God, he does it by saying, [⁂] *He abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself*. God cannot but be what he is; all his perfections are alike unchangeable:

[†] 1 Sam. ii. 2. [†] Matt. xix. 17. [⁂] 2 Tim. ii. 13.

changeable: his justice, goodness, truth and faithfulness, in one word, his holiness, are immutable as his infinite knowledge and almighty power.

3. OUR Lord Jesus Christ is *the image of the invisible* and most *holy God*. Man when first created, had the resemblance of the Deity upon him, and the same is true of man in his renewed state; but never was there that man who bore the image of God in the same high sense as his only-begotten Son, who lay in the *bosom of the Father*. To denote the unspotted purity of the Divine Nature, it is said, *"that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* We may add, that the Son of God is *light of light, * the brightness of his Father's glory.* Where, by *glory*, it is not improbable we are peculiarly to understand the Divine Holiness, according to the use of the same word in another place: *† We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* Before his *descent* into this world, he was the wonder and delight of the worlds above; and to borrow the expression of a celebrated * poet of our own, - - - *outshone myriads though bright* - - - even all the

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^w 1 John i. 5. ^z Heb. i. 3. [†] 2 Cor. iii. 8.
* Milton.

angelical hosts, who, with unenvying eyes, beheld and admir'd his surpassing excellence, at least all of them but those who afterward prov'd apostate. The delight which the Father and the Son mutually took in each other; the Son to contemplate in the Father the immense fountain and original of all good; and the Father to view in his Son the fairest reflection and most lovely image of his holiness: this delight, as it was mutual, so was it ineffable. ^z *The Lord possessed me, saith Wisdom in the Proverbs of Solomon, in the beginning of his way, before his works of old: when he prepared the heavens I was there; I was by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.* So might the word have said, ^a *who was in the beginning with God.* And why then did he come down in the likeness of sinful flesh? because, as Wisdom saith, *He rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.* Well then, we are now to consider this wonderful person as incarnate; and here we may observe,

4. *CHRIST was holy in his birth, according to the words of the angel in his salutation to his virgin mother: ^b The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also*

^z Prov. viii. 22. ^a John i. 1. ^b Luke i. 35.

also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. Observe, as born of the virgin, he was *holy*, immaculate in his conception, without any internal disorder whatsoever; human nature, as it was in him, having suffered no injury thro' the first apostacy, and the gradual degeneracy of mankind afterward. The nature of man was become like a garden, which, through neglect, is over-run with usefess, if not with noxious weeds; whereas in the man Christ Jesus, there were none of the seeds of avarice, ambition, sensuality, envy, pride, malice; nothing in his temper and constitution, which as he grew up inclin'd him to any of those sins; which cannot be said of any one besides him. Nor did that *holiness* which he brought into the world with him, consist only in a freedom from all irregular propensities, or dispositions towards them; but was a *positive* thing, a sort of *prepossession* on the side of virtue and piety, which discover'd itself with the first dawning of reason in all the engaging actions of the most amiable and innocent childhood; and more visibly, as he grew up, by his filial obedience to his earthly parents, and his delighting in the honour and service of God his heavenly Father. *Wot ye not* (saith he to *Joseph* and his mother, when

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they found him *disputing with the doctors in the temple, and asking them questions*) that *I must be about my Father's business?* This was when he was *twelve* years old; after which it is said, that *he went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them, increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.* These instances of an extraordinary piety and goodness in his earliest years, were *partly* owing to the *holiness* of his birth, and evident proofs and indications of it.

5. HE was *holy* in his life; the whole of which was ^d *without sin*, and every part adorned with all the *fruits of holiness*, to the praise and glory of God: for *such an high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.* This variety of expressions is employ'd to signify the super-eminent degree of *purity* in our blessed Saviour. The devils themselves, as much as they hated him for his *holiness*, were forced to pay homage to it: ^e *I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God.* And certainly the splendor of his virtues must be very extraordinary to extort praises from those wicked and malignant spirits, who are themselves lost to all goodness. In the life of Jesus we have an example of *sinless perfection*; he *fulfilled all righteousness*: and
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^d Heb. iv. 15. vii. 26.

^e Mark i. 24.

as herein he was singular, and much ^f *fairer than the children of men*, among whom there never was any one, excepting himself, who liv'd without all sin; so from hence I think it may be inferred, that his conception and birth were singular too. For though it *cannot* be said of the rest of mankind, that they are *sinful by nature*, so as to *deserve* the *wrath* and curse of God, before they have committed *actual* sin; yet it seems very evident, that our nature, as deriv'd to us from *sinful* parents, and in the ordinary way, has not that *perfect* soundness and exactness of temperament which it had in the *first man*, as he came out of the hand of God; and in the *second Adam*, ^s *who is the Lord from heaven*, by means of his miraculous conception. Our declining from the perfect rule of righteousness in the course of our lives, is not the *mere* effect of education, or imitation; since Jesus Christ was born into the *same* world that we are, and bred up as we are, among corrupt and vicious examples. In these things he did not differ from other men; living the life of *sense* before he liv'd the life of *reason*: and how then came he to differ from them so very much in his life; that whereas ^h *they have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God,*

^f Psal. xlv. 2. ^s I Cor. xv. 47. ^h Rom. iii.
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God, ⁱ he was tempted as we are, yet without sin? It is doubtless to be ascribed in a great degree to the perfect *rectitude* of his nature; ^k who came forth from the father when he came into the world. But it is also highly probable, from the reason of the thing, and from the words of the angel before cited, that it was in part owing to his having the human frame convey'd to him with that degree of *rectitude* and *perfection*, in which none of the posterity of *Adam* besides ever enjoy'd it.

6. To promote the interest of religion and holiness was the great design of *Christ*, living and dying: all that he did, all that he taught, and all that he suffer'd, was directed to this end. For this end ^l he was made flesh, and tabernacled among men; and for the same end, after he had finished his work upon earth, he ascended to the right-hand of the Majesty in the heavens: and having ^m obtained of the Father the promise of the spirit, poured it upon his church; for he ⁿ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, or baptism by the word, and might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. We quite mistake the design

ⁱ Heb. iv. 15.

^k John xvi. 28.

^l John i. 14.

^m Acts ii. 33.

ⁿ Ephes. v. 26, 27.

sign of Christ in coming into the world, and the nature and aim of his mediation, if we imagine it to be *confined* to the making *satisfaction* for sin ; no, but he ^o *was therefore manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Through the subtlety and malice of this apostate spirit, man was fallen from God ; and having once left the fountain of his being and felicity, he departed farther and farther from him. What now shall be done with this lapsed race ? shall it be destroyed or restored ? the latter of these is determined in the councils of heaven, where love and mercy preside : and see the great Deliverer comes ! but be not deceived ; he comes not to save *us in our sins*, (such a salvation is indeed a plain contradiction) but to rescue us from the dominion of them, and that the image of God might again be delineated upon the soul of man, without which it must lie under an eternal incapacity of his favour. This was the design of our blessed Saviour, this his undertaking, and a very noble one it is, if rightly understood, and altogether worthy of the Son of God, his *holy one*. If he had not loved *holiness* in the highest degree, he would not have been at so much expence, and gone through so many difficulties, that he might bring down this stranger from heaven,

ven, whither it was fled ; and procure it not only to dwell among men, but to reign, and flourish, and extend its conquests on all sides.

7. THIS character of *holiness*, which our Saviour possessed in so *eminent* a degree, rendered him *dear* and *acceptable* to the Father. He was therefore chosen to be the redeemer of the world, because he was *holy* ; according to those words before cited, *such a high priest became us, who was holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners*. Any other high priest would not have been *qualified* for the work to which our Saviour was called ; being our *sacrifice*, as well as our *priest*, he could not have ^p *taken away the sins of the world*, if he had any sin of his own which needed expiation : in that case he must have offered for himself, or must have been beholden to some one else, if any such person could be found to offer for him. And as the *holiness* of our Lord and Saviour was a *qualification* for his office, and a peculiar motive in the choice of him to it ; so it is the *foundation* of that glory into which he entered, after having passed through his sufferings. So the writer to the *Hebrews* observes ^a ; *unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom.*

^p John i. 29. ^a Hebr. i. 3, 9.

dom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. He has done more to revive the cause of *holiness*, and to diffuse it through the reasonable part of God's creation, than all the angels ever did or can do; and has therefore *a more excellent name than they.* Why is he God's *well-beloved Son*, but because he is his *holy Child Jesus*? This deserves to be well considered by us. Christ is the *beloved Son* of God, because *he is the brightness of his Father's glory* in respect of his *holiness*, in which God is said to be *glorious*, and the *express* character or *image* of *his person*. And because he bears a nearer resemblance to God, the great original of all perfection, particularly in *holiness*, than any created being whatsoever; *therefore* there is no *creature* so near and dear to God, as his *only-begotten Son*. He is the *beloved* by way of eminence; not only *beloved*, not only *greatly* beloved, but beloved *above all*; being in a singular manner *holy* as his father is *holy*. We read of the *holy angels*, and of several names, such as *angels*, and *arch-angels*, *thrones*, *dominions*, *principalities*, *powers*, which seem to be expressive of certain ranks and orders among them, raised in de-
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 * Exod. xv. 11. † Matt. xxv. 31. ‡ Theff. iv. 16.
 Col. i. 16.

gree one above another ; and if there be this superiority of some angels to others, it is very natural to suppose that they are highest in favour, who are most perfect in *holiness*. Above all these sits the Son of God at the ^t *right hand of the Majesty in the heavens*, the most resplendent image of his *holiness*, and therefore of his authority ; *angels, and principalities, and powers being made subject to him*.

THIS part of our Saviour's character being of so great importance, deserves a distinct *application*.

I. LET us contemplate this *character* of our blessed Saviour, as an *honour* to us, and a *credit* to our religion. It is really our *honour* who are called christians, and a very great honour, if we rightly consider it, that our Lord and Master was so excellent a person. The gospel history (the truth of which there is no room to question) gives such an account of his life and actions, and sets him far above the most famous lawgivers and founders of religion that have ever been. The exemplariness of his life answer'd to the wisdom and excellency of his commands and institutions. As to all others, if we examine their *laws*, we find very considerable flaws and imperfections in them ; such things as cannot be

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^t Heb. viii. 1.

reconciled with the dictates of sound reason, and just notions of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness; and had we no other way of knowing the lives of these men, we may be sure they were not more perfect than their laws, and therefore not free from all blame. And our Saviour pretending to have received his laws from God, if indeed he had not, but had been an impostor, would have discover'd himself both these ways; I mean, both by *errors* in his *doctrine* and in his *life*; we should not have had such a compleat and lively representation of *virtue* and *holiness* in his precepts, and much less in his actions: so that we have reason, even upon this account, to *rejoice* and *glory* in *Christ Jesus*. We cannot be *ashamed* of *his gospel*, if we understand it; and we have no more reason to be ashamed of *him*, than of his *gospel*: nay, his life reflects a lustre upon his religion; we may be sure the *religion* is *divine*, (not only as a great part of it may be discover'd by the light of nature to flow from the *divinity*; but considered as to the manner of its being made known to the world by a *supernatural* revelation, we may, I say, be sure that the *religion* is *divine* in this sense) because we see so much that is divine and god-like in the *author* of it. One who was not from God, while he gave out that
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he was, could never have kept up to his character as our Saviour did, living and dying. Let us therefore join in celebrating our glorious Lord ; and as the angels in their adorations of the Almighty repeat the title which they reckon most honourable to him, saying, "*Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who art, and wert, and art to come* ; so let us in our thoughts and meditations dwell upon the *holiness* of our redeemer : consider what an honour it is to him that he is God's *holy Son* ; and by reflection and communication, what an honour it is to us, and our most *holy faith*.

2. ALL christians may hence infer the *indispensible necessity* of an *holy life*. A christian who does not live *holily*, is a christian only in name ; he is self-condemned, and hath nothing at all to which he can reasonably trust. The present subject will supply us with *three* arguments in proof of the necessity of *holiness*, which are absolutely unanswerable : for whether christians consider their *profession* ; or their desire of an interest in the *love* and *approbation* of their Redeemer ; or their *hope* of final happiness in the *presence* of God ; they must own the *necessity* of their becoming *holy* persons, and leading an *holy* life. - - - But of these in the next discourse.

S E R-

" Revel. iv. 8.



S E R M O N VII.

The Providence of God vindicated in permitting the Sufferings of Christ.

A C T S iv. 27.

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

I N these words we have observed two things, both of them highly worthy of our notice.

I. THE *character* of our blessed Lord. He is here called God's holy child, whom he had anointed.

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II. THE *reception* he met with from the world. *Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together against him.*

I have considered the first observation, and drawn one inference from it, which was this : To contemplate this *character* of our blessed Saviour, as an *honour* to us, and a *credit* to our religion.

2. ALL christians may hence infer the *indispensible necessity* of an *holy life* : for whether christians consider their *profession* ; or their *desire* of an interest in the *love* and *approbation* of their *redeemer* ; or their *hope* of final happiness in the *presence* of God ; they must own the *necessity* of their becoming *holy* persons, and leading an *holy* life.

I. THEY are strongly obliged to this by their *profession* ; as they themselves must be sensible, if they reflect as they ought upon what they profess. They profess themselves the *disciples* of *Jesus Christ*, and to have a very high and singular *affection* to their Lord and Master. All who profess christianity profess themselves the *disciples* and *followers* of *Jesus Christ*, ^w *the author of their faith* : and what is a follower of Christ, but one who follows ^x his *example*, and *treads in his steps* ? what else is a dis-

^w Hebr. xii. 2.

^x 1 Pet. ii. 21.

a disciple of Jesus, but one who puts himself under his instruction, in order to *learn* of him, not matters of *mere* speculation, but of *practice*? We are to learn of him to *be*, and to *do good*; *⁊ then are we his disciples indeed*, and not otherwise. So that we are guilty of contradicting ourselves, when we challenge the name of Christ's disciples, and yet refuse to obey and imitate our master; that is, to do as he hath taught us, both by his precepts and by his example. I believe there are very few among those who attend our publick assemblies, that would not take it hard to have their christianity disputed; and think we wrong'd them much if we made a question of their being the disciples of Jesus Christ. 'Tis true, indeed, they were baptized into his name, and openly profess it; and why then should any one go about to deprive them of this honour? Let them with all my heart enjoy the *name*, so they are mindful of the *thing* intended by it: but it will do them very little service, to be called by a *name* which does not belong to them, and to make a profession of something to which they appear utter strangers: which is manifestly the case as often as men are called the disciples of Christ, and take no care to be like him; profess to follow him, and yet take a quite contrary

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⁊ John viii. 31.

way to that which by his doctrine and his life he hath marked out to us. Can there be a more glaring contradiction than this? must not they who so shamefully counter-act their own profession, expect to be condemned out of their own mouths? Let us frequently therefore call this to mind, that we are no farther the disciples of Christ, than we imitate our master; and that whatever we profess, unless we are conformed to the *holiness* of the Son of God, we are not followers of him, but of his great enemy, the *prince of this world*, and the spirit of wickedness and error. Again, in making a profession of christianity, we profess a very high and singular degree of *affection* to Christ: and for what is it we love him? is it not for his *personal excellencies*, as well as for his inestimable benefits? In the idea of love to Christ, is not the most transcendent esteem of him implied, as deserving our love upon the account of his most amiable qualities; of what he is in himself, as well as of what he is, or may become, to us? nay, and not only an *esteem* of him as most excellent and *holy*, but a *delight* in him as such? Certainly this must be acknowledg'd the true notion of love to Christ, at least an essential part of it. Is it thus we love Christ? does his *holiness* render him lovely in our eyes? and what follows? that if we

love a *holy* Jesus, *because* he is holy, we shall love *holiness*; and if we love *holiness*, we shall *endeavour* to be possessed of it: we shall not be satisfied without it, and shall think ourselves in the same proportion *happy* as we are *holy*. The consequence is unavoidable, and it concerns all those who profess love to Christ, to reflect upon it: and who is there that does not profess this? everyone does it implicitly, who makes a profession of christianity; as I believe there is no one, who being ask'd whether he does not love Christ, would not readily reply, yes I do. 'Tis possible, that our notion of love may be very defective, and I doubt is so very often; but 'tis enough to show our obligation to an *holy* life, that we profess to love and esteem one whom we acknowledge to have been *holy* in the most eminent degree: for the object of our love being so transcendently holy, 'tis plain, if we have no concern to be *holy* ourselves, our love to this *holy* person is a mere pretence; or at best a love for the *blessings* which he has purchas'd, not a love to the *person* who has purchased them. Indeed there are some of the blessings themselves which we can have no value for without *holiness*; since the image of God, consisting in *righteousness* and true *holiness*, is one of the principal benefits of the new covenant; and a benefit which in

the same degree as we prize it, we shall labour to attain.

2. CHRISTIANS are obliged to a life of *holiness* by their *desires* and *expectations* of an interest in the *love* of *Christ*. We all desire this, and many of us expect it, and depend upon it: happy if we are not mistaken in our expectations! In order to know whether we are, let us consider what we all believe; that Jesus Christ was as *holy* on earth, as he is now in Heaven; *tempted like as we are, yet without sin*; and then let us reflect and examine, not whether we also are *without sin*, but whether we do *sincerely* hate it, and strive against it; not whether the image of God upon our souls, and in our conversation be *perfect*, but whether it be *visible*. In whomsoever this image is found, that person has no just reason to doubt of his having a part in the love of Jesus; that Christ so loves him, as to delight in him: but where this image does not appear, there is not the least room to imagine that such a one is a favourite of the Redeemer. So far Christ loves us *all*, that he would be well pleased to make us *holy*, in order to our being happy; but he loves none so as to *delight* in them, who have nothing at all to recommend them to his love, not so much as the beginnings of the *holy*, and *divine* life in the temper of their souls;

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no endeavours to be righteous, no hungrings and thirstings after it. This love of Christ to the souls of men, is *primarily* and *directly* a love of those few rays or emanations of *holiness* which are in them, and only *secondarily* of persons: his love of these is for the sake of the divine likeness which they bear, and consequently is always in proportion to it. How fatally then do all they deceive themselves, who fancy that Christ, out of a strange *fondness* for their persons, of which they can give no reason, (and indeed according to their doctrine, no reason at all can be given) loves them, tho' they have no love to *holiness*; and when it is necessary, will by an *irresistible grace* work it in them, tho' they do not trouble themselves about it! Is this arguing in a right manner, from the *holiness* of Jesus? can any thing really be more out of the way? The Psalmist says, *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*; and by similitude of reason we may say, the *holy Jesus loves holiness*; and loving nothing but *holiness*, can love none but *holy* persons. Observe, I am still speaking of a love of delight and complacency; of a love that is peculiar and appropriating; and which is the love wherein we desire to have a share. A *holy head*, and *unholy members*, will never agree. And now what is become of that

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presumptuous reliance upon the *righteousness* of Christ, which I fear is too common? Are there not persons who secretly feed themselves with hopes that they may be clothed with this; so that the *shame of their nakedness shall not appear*, notwithstanding they continue in the practice, and under the power of sin? Wo to all such deluded souls! to live and die in sin, is absolutely inconsistent with living to Christ, and dying in him. The imputation of Christ's *righteousness* explained in a *sound* sense, can signify no more, than our being declar'd free from all the penal effects of sin thro' the mediation of Jesus Christ the righteous, and entitled to everlasting life: but can it once enter into our thoughts, that any one shall be freed from the *punishment* of sin, who lives in the *practice* of it? or intitled to future happiness, who is not in the disposition of his mind at all prepared for it?

3. BY all our *hopes* of *final acceptance* in the sight of God the father, we are under the most indispensable obligations to all holiness of life: for do but consider a little what is the great *attractive* of the love of God to his own Son; the ground of that peculiar delight and complacency he has in him. We are deceived if we think that God loves him from the same principle as parents too often love their children,

children, even to fondness, whether they deserve it or no, or even resemble them or no. Could such a Being as Jesus Christ be supposed, one as perfect and as pure as he, not having his origin from God but from himself, or from some other cause; it is reasonable to think, upon this supposition, that God would delight in him, as much as he does in his own Son; since it is not his being the Son of God, but bearing a nearer resemblance to him than any other being, that sets him so high in the divine favour. And does God delight in the Son of his bosom for no other reason, but that he resembles him in those perfections of his nature, for which he loves and delights in himself; and will he accept us for any other? By this one example of advancing his Son to his *right hand* for his *holiness* and ^a *obedience*, does he not proclaim to all the world what they are to expect from him? that there is no other way of access into his favour? that if ^b *any seek for glory, honour, and immortality*, it must be by *patiently continuing in doing good*, and suffering evil? that it was in this manner his Son came to have the disposal of eternal life, and of all the favours and preferments of heaven, and in this way all his followers must partake of them? Does he not speak to us from
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^a Philip ii. 8, 9.^b Rom. ii. 7.

his throne, *behold my Son !* in the *rewards* I have bestowed upon him, see how I have loved him ! and in *himself* see and consider the *ground* of my love ! to please me you must *honour* him, *trust* in him, and be *like* him. By the way, let me take notice of this as an argument to *humility*, *holiness*, and *obedience*, which is *peculiar* to christianity ; so peculiar, that neither reason, nor any religion that ever was before, has any thing like it to propose. Christianity sets before us, in the person of our blessed Saviour, the most consummate example of all virtue and goodness, and this virtue rewarded in the most glorious manner ; and in both, that is in his *holiness*, and in the *reward* of it, calls us to consider him as our pattern : so should we *live* ; and so, if we live as he did, shall we be *crowned*. Our crown cannot be expected to shine so bright as his ; and no wonder, when our virtues and our obedience are so much inferior. But still this is certain, that the rule fix'd by God, and therefore unchangeable and everlasting, is that we must be like Christ in his state of humiliation, if we would be like him in his glorified state ; and that in the same degree as we resemble him in the one, we shall do it in the other. This therefore is the second inference : we here see the *indispensible necessity* of a *holy* life ; we are obliged to it by our christian
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profession, our profession of being the *disciples* of Christ, and of having the highest *esteem* and *affection* to our Master ; by our *desires* and *expectations* of an interest in the love of Christ ; and by all our *hopes* of final acceptance in the presence of God the Father at last.

3. THIS instructs us under what *notion* we are to *attend* upon the *ordinances* of the gospel, and to *prize* and value them. They are the ordinances and appointments of the *holy* Jesus ; of one, whose design in living and dying was to advance the cause of *holiness* and *virtue* among men in all its parts ; and who is pursuing the very same design, by his word and spirit, now that he is risen from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God : for which reason we are to look upon all gospel institutions as *means* of *holiness*, and to regard them as of no use and benefit to us, where they do not answer this end. 'Tis true, there are other ends for which they were intended ; but then these ends cannot be attain'd without this, nor in a higher degree. It was, doubtless, intended, that in these ordinances we *should have fellowship*, or communion, *with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*, and find great delight in this communion : but who are they that have communion with the God of *holiness*,

liness, and with a *holy* Redeemer? surely not the *unholy* and *unclean*: "For *what communion has light with darkness; what fellowship has Christ with Belial?*" The ordinances of the gospel are stil'd *holy*; not only in respect of *improper* or *relative* holiness, but *real* and *inherent*. By these duties and ordinances we are separated from the world; and in them we devote and set apart ourselves to the service and honour of God; this is *relative* holiness: and in this sense the *Jews* were made a *holy* or *peculiar people* by the ordinances of their law; even those which were of a ceremonial nature; since these, as well as others, were rites and forms of dedication to the true God. But besides this, we are to remember, that there is *another* kind of holiness, to which this *relative* holiness is only *subservient*, I mean, that which is *real* and *inherent*; and that the great design of the gospel, in all the institutions of it, is to promote this. We are *baptized*, that we may thereby be engaged to be *holy*; we *pray* to God, we *sing* his *praises*, we *meditate* in his *word*, and *attend* upon the publick ministry of it, that we may be *holy*. In a particular manner we *partake* of the *holy supper*, hoping that we are already sanctified in some imperfect degree, and that by
this

this excellent means of *grace* we shall encrease in *holiness*. The Lord's supper is an institution wonderfully fitted to promote this end; the person in remembrance of whom we are commanded to keep this feast, being Jesus Christ, the most perfect pattern of all virtue and goodness, of obedience and resignation to God, of charity to men, and of temperance, humility, and self-denial as to his own appetites, all the interests of the present life, and life itself. And with regard to this divine person, what we are in a particular manner called to fix our thoughts upon in this ordinance, is his *death*, which he suffered, to *take away the sins of the world*; inasmuch, that as in the *life* of Jesus we see the *beauty* of *holiness*, so in his *death* we behold the *evil* of *sin*; and in both, how far a mind obedient and resigned to God, can carry a person. The result is, that whoever does not come to the Lord's supper with a view of being hereby excited, engaged and assisted to lead a holy and a christian life; but thinking that this ordinance will supply the place of it, and that by keeping this commandment of his Lord and Saviour, he shall make some atonement and satisfaction for his breaking of others; has a very wrong notion of this sacrament, and instead of receiving any benefit from it, is likely to be much the worse for it; a worse christian,

christian, and consequently in a worse condition. On the contrary, all those who have a real love of *holiness*, and consequently a rational esteem of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as a most illustrious example of it, and of the gospel, and particularly of this institution, as admirably fitted to promote it, and upon this principle approach the Lord's table, and communicate in the memorials of his body and blood ; all such persons have the greatest encouragement that can be desired to draw nigh to God in this duty ; they may expect to enjoy in it the beginnings of heaven, both in respect of *holiness* and *happiness* ; and after having imitated the life of Christ, and with true devotion shewn forth his death, to be more intimately acquainted with him in a better world, and being fitted by the perfection of their nature for a perfection of happiness, to be put into the everlasting possession of it.

THUS have I finished the first observation from the words, and distinctly applied it. I now proceed to the other :

II. WE have in them also an account of the *reception* which this *divine* person met with from the *world*. Both *Herod* and *Pontius Pilate*, &c. *princes* and *people*, *Jews* and *Heathens*, *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, persons

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sons of every rank, of every religion, of every sect, join'd in this wicked confederacy. *David* was in this a type or figure of the Messiah his Son and Lord; that he had a great number of enemies, who conspired against him, and opposed his coming to the throne, and his settlement in it, though he was chosen to it by God, and anointed by his express command. Not only *Saul*, who then wore the crown, and his family to whom it would have descended, bore him (*Jonathan excepted*) an implacable hatred; but many others who were in the interest of *Saul*, and ready to serve his worst passions. And besides those who were of the *same* nation and religion, he had a great many *foreign* enemies, with whom he was continually at war. Hence it was, that, when after a long persecution, he was advanced to the throne, he was not own'd by all his subjects 'till some years afterwards; and was far from reigning in that undisturbed and quiet manner as *Solomon* his successor. This gave occasion to his writing the *second*, and *twenty second Psalms* more particularly; in which, being divinely moved by the Holy Ghost, he so described his own enemies, and the unjust treatment he received from them, as plainly to point out those of a much greater person than himself. That the *Messiah*, or *Christ*, was the person

person principally referred to in the second Psalm, we cannot doubt, having the authority of the apostles and first disciples, who, in the prayer recorded in the chapter from which my text is taken, apply it to him, in the two verses preceding the text; *Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against his Christ, or anointed.* And as to the xxii^d Psalm, several passages are cited out of it by the evangelist ^d St. Matthew, as prophetic of our Saviour's last passion: *They who had power used it against him; many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round: they gaped upon me with their mouths, as a roaring and a rav'ning lion.* Nay, they who could do nothing else, could yet despise and laugh at the meek and unblameable Jesus: *they could shoot out the lip, and shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him:* or as it is in the margin, *if he delight in him.* Herod and Pontius Pilate were both of them governors of the Jews, by commission from the emperor of Rome; one of them by religion a Jew, if really of any religion; the other

^d Matth. xxvii.

other a *Heathen*. Between these two there had been an enmity for some time, yet could they agree together in their despiteful usage of the blessed *Jesus*; and were upon this very occasion *made friends together again*. With these join'd the *high-priest*, the *sanhedrim*, or *Jewish* council, the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, the whole body of the people, and the *Roman* soldiers who were among them. The *Jews* and *Romans* were the most opposite one to the other that could be, both in their civil and religious customs: the *Jews* hated the *Romans* both as idolaters and as their conquerors; and the *Romans* despised the *Jews*. The *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* did, 'tis true, alike make profession of the law and religion of *Moses*; but notwithstanding this, they are known to have differed in the most fundamental points: the *Sadducees* believing nothing of a resurrection, or of angels and spirits; while the *Pharisees* openly declared their faith of all these. And yet the *Jew* and the *Gentile*, the *Pharisee* and the *Sadducee*, were not at such a distance from one another; but they could unite their vote, and interest, and power against the person and religion of our blessed Saviour. The people, whom he had instructed, with so much tenderness as well as authority at once taking compassion of their souls, and of their bodies, healing these

in a miraculous manner, could, when the word was given, cry out with one voice,
^b *crucify him, crucify him.* And having used the *Master of the house* in this cruel and opprobrious manner, it is no wonder they express'd so little kindness to *those of the household*; it is no wonder the *disciples* fared much as *their Lord* did; and that *Christ*, the *Author of our faith*, having been put to the most shameful and painful death, his *followers* and his *religion*, for a long time afterwards, were every where spoken against; and every where pursued with the most relentless malice. But when we consider the *general* cry that was raised against our Saviour and his religion; the reception he met with from the world, though he profess'd to come to them upon so kind a message; when we consider that he was
^c *the reproach of men, and despised of the people*; may it not be urg'd as an objection against him, "If he had been the person he gave himself out for, can it be supposed he would have been *forsaken of God*, and *persecuted by man*? would *heaven and earth* have turn'd *against* him, if he had not *deserved* it?" My answer is, That however strong this objection may seem to be to some, it is *really* very *weak*; for if there be any weight in the objection, it must turn upon

^b Luke xxiii. 21.^c Psal. xxii. 6.

been without sin, which can be said of no one else, and yet have *suffer'd* all which is related of him. For do we not see *good* men involved in *great* sufferings? and sometimes the *greatest* sufferings reserved for the *best* men? and is this esteemed a *real* objection against *providence*? is it thought to be any proof that God is not the Governour of the world, that calamities of all kinds befall persons of the most eminent virtue and piety? that they who resemble God *most*, have oftentimes the *least* share of the *good* things of this world, and the *greatest* of its *evils*? is this look'd upon as an argument of any weight against a governing *providence*? If it be, 'tis only by such as are glad to take hold of any pretence for their infidelity. These men may think, that if a wise, and righteous, and good Being presided over human affairs, he would be kindest to his favourites, and express his kindness by heaping the blessings of this life upon them. But what if this is not the *final* state of man? what if the *happiness* for which man is designed, consists in things of a quite *different* nature from those in which the worldling and the sensualist place their felicity? what if the *chief* intention of *providence*, in sorting mens conditions in *this* world, is to excite them to *prepare* for a *better*; and to work in them those dispositions of mind which are
 necessary

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 necessary to their participating in the highest
 happiness of which their nature is capable? what if all this is certainly true? why then
 it is most certain, that this objection against
providence from the adversities of the righte-
 ous, and the prosperity of the wicked, comes
 to nothing. God calls the good man to
 suffer both for his *own* sake, and for the
 sake of *others*; that he himself may be
trained up for the happiness of a better
 world, and that he may be an *example* of
patient resignation to the divine will, of a
 noble *contempt* of the *world*, and of the *empti-
 ness* and worthlessness of present and transi-
 tory things. This reason for the *sufferings*
 of good men, that they may *profit* the *world*
 by their *example*, is mentioned by *Seneca*, a
heathen moralist, who, vindicating the *di-
 vine providence* in the afflictions and dis-
 tresses of such, says, they suffer, *ut etiam
 alios pati doceant*, that they may teach others
 the right manner of bearing afflictions: *nati
 sunt in exemplar*, they are born to be ex-
 amples. But it may be said, other men have
sin enough to justify their *suffering*: they
 suffer no more than they deserve, tho' they
 may suffer more than others; whereas, if
 we may credit those who give us an account
 of the life of *Jesus Christ*, ^d *he did no sin,
 neither was guile found in his mouth.* And

does a state of *suffering* agree with *perfect innocence*? The answer is not difficult: in the same proportion as *Jesus Christ* was more *holy* than any of the sons of men, his example in suffering affliction must be of more use to the world than any of theirs can be, more *instructive*, and more *convincing*. Was this most *holy* person an example of the greatest *sufferings*, and of the greatest *patience* and *submission* under them? was he never in any other than a mean and afflicted condition? and was he contented in it? was this not only a condition to which he submitted, but which he voluntarily chose? then certainly I cannot wonder if I suffer! Since he did not complain and murmur, whose *sufferings* were not deserved, much less ought I to do it under the punishment of my sins; especially when by my sins I have deserved so much more than I suffer. Undoubtedly there must be another, and a better world, where the *dispensations* of *divine providence* shall be unfolded; and a distribution made of *rewards* and *punishments* suitable to the characters and actions of men. This is the lesson which we learn from the *sufferings* of every good man, compared with the prosperous state of a sinner; and much more from those of our blessed Lord, to whom there is none besides that we can liken. The lesson is, that the *happiness* of *man* is not to be

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be look'd for in *this* world, but beyond the grave : and this is a lesson of such importance, that it is no way beneath the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence to permit good men, and even the best of all men, the blessed Jesus, with his own consent, to fall into great *trials* and *sufferings*, in order to admonish the world of this useful truth. So that if there were no other end to be answer'd by the *sufferings* of *Christ*, than the benefit of the *example*, this alone would vindicate the *providence* of God in delivering him up to them. He, our Lord and Master, tho' *innocent* and *holy*, was plac'd in a state of *suffering* and *affliction*, that his disciples might by him be taught how to *suffer* as well as how to *do the will of God*. And this, I say, is a sufficient apology for *providence* ; if we add, that while our Saviour promotes the good of others by his *example*, he himself *loses* nothing. He suffer'd, indeed, but after that ^e *entered into his glory* : ^f *he endured the cross, despising the shame* ; but it was *for the joy set before him* ; not upon the prospect of perishing utterly and for ever at death. Which holds forth a farther instruction to us, *viz.* that if ^g *we suffer with Christ*, in this world, *we shall also reign with him* in the next ; and that ^h *those light afflictions which*

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^e Luke xxiv. 26. ^f Heb. xii. 2. ^g 2 Tim.
ii. 12. ^h Rom. viii. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in the saints. The sum is, no just imputation against the honour of God, and of his providence, can be founded on the sufferings of Christ, consider'd as a good man, one perfectly innocent and holy.

2. THE same may be said, if we consider Christ as a prophet, or extraordinary messenger from God. We might be apt to argue, before we had well thought of it, that in case he had been a true prophet, the wise providence of God would never have admitted of his being treated in so ignominious a manner as he was. But why not? does the mean and obscure appearance of the messenger render his message really contemptible? not at all, supposing he brings sufficient credentials of his commission with him. On the one hand, let the person who sets up for a prophet, be never so rich and powerful, it is no argument of his being the person he pretends, if he has nothing else to procure him credit but his wealth, and power, and greatness; he may have thousands subject to him, but for all that will never the sooner command our belief, that what he teaches is a revelation from God. On the other hand, let us put the case that ⁱ a man speaks so as never man before him did; that his doctrine is worthy of a per-

ⁱ John vii. 46.

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a person *divinely* sent and instructed; such as may be supposed to have God for its author, upon the account of its singular excellency; and that this same person, for a farther confirmation of his mission, works *miracles*, remarkable for their *number*, the *public* manner of their performance, their *greatness*, and their *kind* and *beneficent* nature: let us put the case of such a man as this, and what is there *wanting* to prove him a *true prophet*? could any man teach such doctrines, and do such works, *if God was not with him*? Now this is in fact the case here. Our Saviour's *doctrines* and *miracles* were both exactly such I have now described, and are therefore as clear an evidence of his divine mission as any that can be desired. But did not this person, who we say was a *prophet* of God, *suffer*, and *die*? was he not ill used all the time of his public ministry, and worst of all in the death to which they put him? and is it consistent with the *honour* of God, to let a messenger of his be thus insulted, abused, and at last nailed to a cross; a death which none but malefactors, and of them only slaves, were liable to suffer? In reply, let me observe, that this very thing *compleats* the *evidence* of his being a *true prophet*. To confirm his testimony, he *seals* it with his *blood*; *voluntarily* meets that death which he could

could easily have avoided by disclaiming the titles he had assumed : and surely then being thus a *martyr* for the religion he *taught*, he could not but be *sincere* in *teaching* it. This is the end served by the *sufferings* and *death* of *Christ* as a *prophet* : they show him to have been in *earnest*, that he did not go about to *deceive* the world ; but was himself convinced of the truth of his doctrine, because otherwise he would not have *freely* laid down his life for it. And is this an end or design at all unworthy of God ? If God sends a messenger, does he act unwisely, to place him in such circumstances as will give an opportunity to make full proof of his message ? I conclude therefore, that in the opposition rais'd against *Christ*, and the *sufferings* endured by him, consider'd as a *prophet*, there was nothing which can reasonably be objected against the *providence* of God for permitting it. Much less,

3. Is the *providence* of God to be call'd in question for permitting such things to befall *Christ* consider'd as the *promised Messiah*. When we have said that *Christ* was a perfectly good man, and a *prophet* of God, we have said the *strict* truth, but not the *whole* truth. He was not only an *innocent man*, but the *Son of God* ; he was *more than a prophet*, even that great Redeemer who was *promis'd*

mis'd immediately after the *fall*, and successively foretold by all the *prophets*. Now we may be ready to think that a person of such excellent dignity, one *higher* than the *angels*,^k and *in the beginning with God*, should have been sent into the world with greater pomp and grandeur; that by the dazzling splendour of his appearance men might have been taught to *reverence the Son of God*. But do they, who reason after this manner, reflect as they ought upon the great *design* which brought the Son of God into the world; and that this design would have been *frustrated*, if instead of *taking on him the form of a servant*, he had appeared in the *form* and with the *ensigns* of a *Deity*; or even with the state of a *great* man, living in the fulness of all earthly good things, and meeting with nothing but respect and homage whithersoever he went? Do we not hear him at the entrance on his passion, saying,
¹ *Father, save me from this hour; nevertheless for this cause came I to this hour?* “ Nature
 “ would fain be excused from those agonies
 “ and pains, and all that dolorous scene
 “ thro’ which I am to pass; but I know
 “ this is not consistent with the design laid
 “ by thine infinite wisdom; and knowing
 “ this, I voluntarily suffer all which thou
 “ hast

^k John i. 1.¹ John xii. 27.

“hast appointed.” Upon this account it was, that when *Peter*, hearing him speak of his ^m *sufferings which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*, cried out, *Far be it from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee*: he tells him, that he savoured not the things which be of God. He had not a right notion of the design of his coming into the world, the great expediency of his *sufferings*, and that the *scriptures* could not otherwise have been ⁿ *fulfilled*: thus all things must be. The general office and character of the *Messiah* was that of the Redeemer of mankind; not from present and temporal evils, but from those which are spiritual and eternal. He was ^o *to save his people from their sins*; from *their sin itself*, and from all its penal effects: and how was he to accomplish this salvation? One way was, by teaching men the vanity and worthlessness of the present world; that the world might not be such a fatal temptation, as it too often proves, to violate or neglect their duty; and that they might be brought to pursue after an unseen, a spiritual and heavenly felicity. And can there be a plainer conviction of the truth of this doctrine, that there is little or nothing in this world, that 'tis a very trifle, compared with the recompences of the future state, than we have in the humiliation of the Son of

■ Mat. xvi. 21. ■ Matth. xxvi. 54. ° Matth. i. 21.

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of God? This *divine person* comes into the world, and goes out of it again, without ever having enjoy'd or express'd the least desire to enjoy worldly wealth, and pleasure, and greatness. Why was this? not because these things were not in his power; but because he *despised* them, and would teach us to despise them. The world can never be worth the price at which so many purchase it; the price of their ease and quiet, and even their conscience itself: *Christ* would not then have cast such a contempt upon it as he did. The good or evil things of this life can never be of such value, that for the sake of procuring the one, or avoiding the other, I should hazard the loss of my soul. Nor can I *believe* that they are, if I think how *little* my Saviour *enjoyed* upon earth, and how *much* he *suffered*; and that his portion both of *enjoyment* and *suffering* was of his *own choosing*; and *therefore chosen* by him, that he might raise us above the *influence* of the unsatisfying pleasures, the unprofitable gain, and the tinsel glory of this present state.---*Another* way of *Christ's* redeeming us is, by being our *example*; particularly of *humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness* of injuries, and *resignation* to the *will* of God. His *example*, consider'd only as a good man, and a true *prophet*, is very useful in this respect, and will, in part, account

count for his being left to suffer in both these characters : but his *example* is likely to have a still more forcible influence upon us, when we regard it, not only as the *example* of a good man, and of a prophet ; but of the *Messiah* himself, ^p the Son of God manifested in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil, and to be a pattern of righteousness : that we might learn how to be able to forego pleasure, and to bear pain ; how to submit to the afflicting hand of God, with the most entire complacency of soul, and to receive indignities, affronts, and ill usage from the hands of men ; not only without the desire of revenge, but even without having our desire of their true welfare and happiness thereby abated ; that we might learn all this, the Son of God himself was made in fashion as a man, and suffered as a malefactor, that he might become our *example*. Now if this be a most excellent end, and altogether suitable to the goodness of God, that we should, in the most effectual manner, be taught all these virtues ; then his *providence* cannot lie under any reproach, tho' his own Son, the *Messiah*, the Redeemer of the world, is, for a time, made subject to the power and malice of wicked and unreasonable men. But the *principal design* of
Christ's

Christ's coming into the world, and the principal way in which he accomplishes the redemption of it, is, by making himself a ^a sacrifice for the sins of men; ^r that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ^r Messiah was cut off, as it was written of him, but not for himself. ^r He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes are we healed. The promised Saviour was to be a priest, as well as a king and a prophet. ^u The Lord has sworn, and will not repent: thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Like Melchizedek in this, that he was a royal priest, and ^w continues a priest for ever: but, in another thing, unlike Melchizedek, and all other priests whatsoever; that whereas they offered the blood of bulls and of goats, by way of expiation of sin, he offered up his own; he was both priest and sacrifice, ^w making his life an offering for sin; and then, with his own blood, entering into the holiest of all, and there appearing in the presence of God for us.--- And now the question is, whether it was at all becoming God to send his only-begotten Son into

^a Heb. ix. 26. ^r John iii. 16. ^r Dan. ix.
26. ^r Isai. liii. 5. ^u Psal. cx. 4. ^w Heb. vii.
24. ix. 12, 24.

into the world upon such a design as this? or, whether coming upon such a design, it was not requisite that all things should be ordered as they were? But the answer to these questions, and the remainder of this subject, I shall reserve for the next discourse.



S E R-



S E R M O N VIII.

The Sufferings of Christ no just
Objection against the Divinity of
his Mission.

A C T S iv. 27.

*For of a truth against thy holy child
Jesus, whom thou hast anointed,
both Herod and Pontius Pilate,
with the Gentiles and the people
of Israel, were gathered together.*

I N the foregoing discourse on these words,
I proposed to consider the *reception*
which this *divine* person, God's *holy child*
Jesus, met with from the *world*. Both *He-*
rod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and
the people of Israel, were gathered together a-
gainst him. Persons of every rank, of every

religion, of every sect, join'd in this wicked confederacy. Some may be apt to think this may be urg'd as an *objection* against our Saviour. Had he been the person he gave himself out for, can it be supposed he would have been *forsaken* of God, and thus *persecuted* by *man*? would *heaven* and *earth* have *turn'd* against him if he had not *deserv'd* it? In answer to this, I observ'd, that if there be any weight in the *objection*, it must turn upon one of these two things; either that *God* would not have *permitted* that all this *opposition* should have been raised against *Jesus Christ*, and all those *evils* befallen him, in case he was the person we believe him; or, that they, from whose hands he suffer'd, *cannot* be imagined to have been *so blind and unjust* as to have treated him in the manner they did, supposing him to have *deserv'd* the quite *contrary* usage. But it is not difficult to shew that the reasoning is bad upon either supposition.

I. As to the *objection*, that *God* would not have *permitted* all this *opposition* to have been raised against *Jesus Christ*, and all those *evils* to have befallen him, in case he was the person we believe him to be; when we have look'd into it, and examined it closely, we shall find that it is without a sufficient ground, since it is no way inconsistent with the *wisdom*, or *justice*, or *goodness* of *God*,

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or any other perfection, that he should permit this heavy storm to fall upon the head of our blessed Saviour. There is nothing in all this contrary to the honour of God, whether we consider *Jesus Christ* as a *good man*, as a *prophet*, or as the *Son of God*, and the *promised Messiah*. I have shewn the *permission* to be worthy of God, if we consider our Saviour as a *good man*, and as a *prophet*; and I have, in part, justified this *permission*, considering our Saviour as the *Son of God*, and the *promised Messiah*, and shall now compleat the argument.--- Some may be ready to think, that a person of such excellent dignity, one *higher* than the *angels*, and *in the beginning with God*, should have been sent into the world with greater pomp and grandeur; that by the dazzling splendour of his appearance, men might have been taught to *reverence* the *Son of God*. But do they who reason after this manner, reflect as they ought upon the *great design* which brought the *Son of God* into the world; and that this design would have been frustrated, if instead of *taking on him the form of a servant*, he had appeared in the *form*, and with the *ensigns* of a *Deity*; or even with the state of a *great man*, living in the fulness of all earthly good things, and meeting with nothing but respect and homage whithersoever he went? The general *office* and *character* of

the *Messiah* was, that of the * *Redeemer of mankind*; not from *present* and *temporal* evils, but from those which are *spiritual* and *eternal*. He was to *save his people from their sins*; from *sin itself*, and from all its *penal* effects. One way was, by *teaching* men the *vanity* and *worthlessness* of the *present* world, that the world might not be such a fatal temptation as it too often proves; and that they might be brought to pursue after an unseen, a spiritual, and heavenly felicity. And can there be a plainer conviction of the truth of this doctrine, that there is little or nothing in this world, that it is a very trifle, compar'd with the recompences of a future state, than we have in the *humiliation* of the Son of God? Again, *another way* of *Christ's* redeeming us is, by being an example particularly of *humility*, *meekness*, *patience*, *forgiveness* of *injuries*, and *resignation* to the *will* of God. Now if this be a most excellent end, and altogether suitable to the goodness of God, that we should, in the most effectual manner, be taught all these virtues; then his providence cannot lie under any just reproach, tho' his *own Son*, the *Messiah*, the *Redeemer* of the world, is, for a time, made subject to the power and malice of wicked and unreasonable men. But the *principal design* of *Christ's* coming into the world,

* Gen. iii. 15. xii. 3. Isai. liii. 5, &c.

world, and the *principal way* in which he accomplishes the *redemption* of it is by making himself a *sacrifice for the sins* of men. And now the question is, whether it was at all *becoming* God to send his *only-begotten Son* into the world upon such a design as this? or whether coming upon such a design, it was not requisite that all things should be order'd as they were?

As to the first question, whether it was at all unbecoming God to send his only-begotten Son into the world upon such a design as this? we must say, after we have maturely weigh'd the whole design, that it was not; unless that design can be unbecoming God, in the contrivance and execution of which all his attributes are most gloriously display'd: so that the *work of redemption* does herein resemble the *works of creation*, that the perfections of God are *clearly seen* in both. We see *wisdom* and *goodness* in *laying* the design, and amazing *power* in the accomplishment of it by such *unlikely* means. Nay, we behold the *holiness* and the *mercy* of God in the method of our salvation by *Jesus Christ*; which are attributes that cannot *directly* discover themselves in the frame of the world: the *holiness* of God appears in *requiring* a *sacrifice*; his *mercy*, in *appointing*, *providing*, and *accepting* it. How could God, as righteous and merciful, the supreme Governour of

the world, whose authority had been trodden under foot in his laws, at the same time the Creator and Father of mankind; how could he, to our apprehension, have reconciled these different attributes and relations in any other way as he hath done in this? the *honour* of the law is *vindicated*, and the *observation* of it for the future *better* secur'd; and yet the *sin*ner set *free*: but not without making all the satisfaction he himself can; by humbling himself, confessing and forsaking his sins, and again returning to his duty and allegiance; after which, tho' he is not without sin, yet God ^y *accepts him in the beloved*, ^z *justifies him freely by his grace*, and bestows upon him the reward of *eternal life*. And certainly, when we clearly consider all this, that by the atoning sacrifice of *Christ*, God clears the honour of his own government, and justifies and saves a lost world, we do not dishonour God in believing that this sacrifice was of his appointment. Is it beneath the great and blessed God to *redeem a world*, any more than it was to *create it*? The *design* then of *Christ's* redeeming the world, by his blood, is no ways unbecoming the God of all wisdom and grace; and it being once determined in the counsels of heaven, that the Son of God should come and dwell among men, and be a sacrifice for them, it was not inconsistent with the honour

^y Ephes. i. 6.^z Rom. iii. 24. vi. 23.

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honour of God, but plainly requisite and necessary that he should be ^a *deliver'd* according to the same *counsel* and *foreknowledge of God into wicked hands*, to be crucified and slain. The crucifying the Lord of glory was, in respect of men, who were the agents in it, one of the most horrid crimes that was ever committed; and yet was not prevented, because it served to fulfil a design, the most for God's glory, and for the happiness of mankind, that can be conceiv'd. Neither if against the *sufferings of Christ* we set the *distinguishing marks of honour*, which he receiv'd from God the Father, at his ^b *birth*, when a *chorus* of angels sung his welcome into the world; at his ^c *baptism*, when the *Spirit of God descended upon him*, and a voice came from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*; in the course of his *ministry*, having ^d *grace poured into his lips*, and *power and authority* put into his hands to work all kinds of *miracles*, and in the *greatest number*; at his *death* itself, by the ^e *earthquake*, the *eclipse of the sun*, and other most wonderful circumstances attending it; after his *death*, by his ^f *resurrection on the third day*; and after *forty days* his ^g *ascension into heaven*; and, above all, by

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the

^a Acts ii. 23.

^b Luke ii. 13.

^c Matth. iii.

16, 17.

^d Psal. xlv. 2.

^e Matth. xxvii. 45.

^f Matth. xxviii.

^g Acts i. 2.

the ^h *miraculous effusion* of the *Spirit* on the day of *Pentecost*, and, in a few years, subjecting the whole world to the obedience of a crucified Saviour: if, I say, we put all these honourable distinctions in the ballance against the *sufferings* of *Christ*, we shall have no reason to question whether he was so excellent a person as he is described and represented in scripture, because God permitted all this opposition to be rais'd against him, and all these evils to befall him. Besides that many valuable *ends* were answer'd by his humiliation and death, as I have shown, God was not wanting all along to bear witness to his Son; the cloud which involv'd him soon dispersed; and by what followed after his death, there was no room left to doubt that ⁱ *God had exalted him to his own right-hand, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sin*; and had ^k *given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* But,

2. How can they, from whose hands he suffered, be imagined to have been so *blind*, or so *wicked* and *unjust*, as to have treated *Jesus Christ* in the barbarous and disgraceful manner

^h Acts ii.ⁱ Acts v. 31.^k Phil. ii. 9, 10, 11.

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manner they did, supposing him to have deserved the quite contrary usage? This is the other part of the objection against our Saviour, founded upon his *sufferings*. Now I must confess, at first sight, and before we are acquainted with the circumstances of the case, it must appear exceeding *strange* and almost *incredible*, that one who behaved so unblameably, ¹ *went up and down doing good*, and gave so many infallible proofs of his being sent from God, should be used no otherwise than if he had been the worst of malefactors, and a most notorious impostor; that he who was a ^m *light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel*, should be despised of both; that he should ⁿ *come to his own, and even his own should not receive him*, after they had so long and so impatiently expected him: this, I own, may look very strange to one uninstructed in the true state of the case. But there are several things, which being consider'd, will show, that there is no manner of reason to conclude, from our Saviour's meeting with such ill usage, that therefore he deserv'd it. It has been no unusual thing in the several ages of the world for *good* men to be persecuted by *bad*, and the *best* of men to fall sacrifices to the *worst*. This was long since observ'd by
Jerom.

¹ Acts x. 38.

^m Luke ii. 32.

ⁿ John i. 11.

† *Jerom* of *Prague*, in a most excellent apology which he made for himself before the *council* of *Constance*, who condemn'd him to be burnt for pretended *heresy*; that is, indeed, because he would own no other authority in matters of *faith* but that of *Jesus Christ*, and thought a *reformation* of the church highly necessary. This worthy servant of God, and faithful martyr, spoke thus to his persecutors; "I am not ignorant that many excellent men have been born down by false witnesses, and treated after a manner unworthy of their virtues, and condemned by very unjust decrees:" instancing *Socrates*, who after being unjustly condemned by his fellow-citizens, preferred death before a *disingenuous recantation*, tho' it was in his power to have saved his life by this method. Then he mentions the *captivity* of *Plato*, the *sufferings* of *Anaxagoras* and *Zeno*, the *banishment* of *Rutilius*, and some others, men of the best characters in the several ages and countries in which they lived, and great *sufferers* in the cause of virtue. From hence proceeding to the *Hebrews*, he minds them, that *Moses* was not without his share of reproach and opposition even among that people, to whom God employ'd him to deliver his law; that *Joseph's* brethren

† Vid. L'Enfan's *Hist. of Counc. of Const.* lib. iv. §. 82. & Poggiena.

brethren out of envy sold him, and that he was afterwards put in prison upon *false* reports; that *Isaiab*, *Daniel*, and almost all the prophets, were persecuted unjustly; concluding with the *examples* of *John the Baptist*, *Jesus Christ*, and most of the apostles, who were put to death by seditious and ungodly men. Such was the apology of this brave man, in which he had for his pattern, as well as in his steadfast adherence to the faith, the first martyr who fell in the cause of his Lord and Master *Jesus Christ*, I mean, ° *St. Stephen*, who standing before the *council* of *Jerusalem*, and reciting to them some passages of their own history, drew a secret parallel between their perverseness and obstinacy and those of former generations. Were they ready to say of Christ, *we will not have this man to rule over us?* so did their ancestors refuse *Moses*, saying, *Who made thee a ruler and a judge?* and even after they had received the *lively oracles* by his hand, yet would not obey them, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again unto *Egypt*. Were they the *betrayers* and *murderers* of the *Just One*? and did not their *Fathers*, in like manner, *persecute* the *prophets*, and *slay* them *who shewed before of his coming*? From which it appears, that it was no *new* thing, either among *Gentiles* or *Jews*, for those
of

of whom the *world was not worthy* to be treated as if they were not worthy to live in the world ; and the *reason* of this is to be sought in the *vices*, and *passions*, and *prejudices* of mankind. There have been always two parties in the world, the virtuous and the vicious ; the advocates for truth, and the lovers of a lie ; ^p *the seed of the woman*, and *the seed of the serpent* ; between whom there has been an *enmity* from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end of it. To this let us add the consideration of the *extreme corruption* of that age, when our Saviour made his appearance among men. ^q *They were all gone astray, were altogether become filthy* : the *Gentiles* sunk into the grossest idolatries, and most abominable vices ; the *Jews* so wicked, that an ^r *Historian* of their own says of them : “ If the *Romans* had not destroy’d them when they did, it might have been expected, that either the *earth* would have *opened* and *swallowed* them up, or a *deluge* would have *swept* away their *city*, or *fire* from *heaven* *consumed* it, as it did *Sodom* ; since it brought forth a generation of men far more wicked than they who suffered such things.” And when the wickedness of men was so great upon the earth, it is more easily conceivable how the
light

^p Gen. iii. 15. ^q Rom. iii. 12. Psal. xiv. 3.
^r Joseph. de Bell. Jud. l. 5. c. 10. § 5. & c. 13. § 6.

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light should shine in the darkness, and yet the darkness prevail against the light : that the *Son of God* should be *in the world*, and yet *the world know him not* ; and not knowing him, because blinded by their passions, should with *wicked hands crucify and slay him*. Another thing which very much takes off the force of this objection against Christ, drawn from his sufferings is, that all which was done to him proceeded from a *few* men in comparison. As his ministry was in a manner confined to his own countrymen, so the *Romans* would hardly have troubled themselves about him, if they had not been set on by the *Jews* ; and from the history of his apprehension and trial it appears, that when he was accused before *Pilate* the *Roman* governour, *Pilate* was willing enough to have set him at liberty ; and at last gave way to the malice of his accusers, not from a belief that he was guilty of death, but for fear that if he protected *Jesus*, they would represent him as no *friend to Cæsar*. The *Sadducees*, while they profess'd to believe the law of *Moses*, entertain'd principles destructive of all religion, and could therefore act any part which they apprehended to make most for their temporal interest. As for the *people*, there was a time when they were very
zealous

[†] John i. 5. 10.

[†] John xix. 12.

zealous for Christ, followed him in crowds, heard him gladly, admir'd the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; were convinced by his miracles that he was a prophet, sang *Hosannas* to him as the *Son of David*, (which was one of the titles of the Messiah) and would have continued to the last in his interest, if their priests and princes, the greatest men in church and state, had been on that side. Of this affection of the people to Christ the chief priests and elders were so sensible, that when they consulted together how they might take Jesus and kill him, they would not do it publickly on the feast-day, lest there should be an uproar amongst the people: but this same people, when they saw him arraigned by their rulers, and accused by the high-priest as a blasphemer, join in the cry, crucify him, crucify him - - *Sequitur fortunam ut semper, et odit, damnatos.* - - - We have therefore, at last, trac'd the matter to the heads and leaders of the Jewish nation; here was the spring of all. Christ might have escap'd well enough, if he had not offended them; and by what method did he incur their displeasure? by those very things which prov'd his divine mission; by his free way of reproving vice and hypocrisy wheresoever he found them; by his unspotted holiness, his contempt of worldly power and dominion, his life and doctrine equally meek and humble, and self-denying. Such a man as this was not for
their

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their turn ; they expected another kind of *Messiah* ; and, afraid that if he was suffered to go on, he *would draw all the world after him*, and so there would be at once an end of their authority ; they were resolved not to leave him till they had brought him to the cross : as accordingly they did, more to their own reproach, than that of our blessed Saviour, " *who was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.* These are the *husbandmen* in the ^x *parable*, who when their Lord sent his Son to them, said, *This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours* : we shall then have the management of all, and be able to lord it over God's heritage. Add but this one consideration more, that the religion taught by Jesus Christ, and for which both the master and his disciples were persecuted to the death, has been faithfully delivered down to us, and upon examination proves to be the most *perfect* and *excellent* religion that ever was ; alike calculated to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind ; to make men easy in themselves, and blessings to all about them ; useful in this world, and qualified for a better. Now this being in fact the religion of which Christ was the author, and the apostles and other disciples of our Lord the preachers and publishers ;

and

^u *Isaiah liii. 7.*

^x *Mat xxi. 33, &c.*

and the lives and actions of the author and witnesses of our faith being suitable to the religion taught by them, holy, heavenly, peaceable, and charitable as that is ; if we find that, notwithstanding all this, both the religion and the preachers of it were oppos'd and persecuted, what is the inference that we are to draw from it ? that Christ, and his doctrine, and followers deserved such evil treatment ? no : but that they were very bad men, and carried away by their own passions, or by the current of prevailing errors, who first of all persecuted the *master*, and then *those of his household*. And what was the issue of all the opposition which earth and hell combined could make against the gospel of Christ, and the professors of it ? The gospel spread like the light of the morning, which gradually dispels the shades of the night, and the number of its professors increased daily, so that in the progress of a few years, the world, as it were, wonder'd to see itself become christian.

UPON the whole then, the *reception* which our blessed Saviour met with from the world is far from being an argument that he was not *God's holy child Jesus, whom he* had anointed. He might be so, and yet suffer all that he suffered ; nay he would not have been so, if he had not. A *temporal Messiah* would not have answered the
I
exigencies

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exigencies of *mankind*, he might have *pleased* the *Jews* better, but would not have been such a *real* friend and benefactor to the *whole world* as our crucified Redeemer has prov'd himself. 'Tis true, the *Messiah* was to be a *King*; but not like the kings of the earth, whose *power* is over the *bodies* of men only, and their *glory visible*: he was to exercise no royalty but what was consistent with the character of a *meek*, and *lowly*, and *humble Saviour*: he was as a *Priest* to offer sacrifice for the sins of his people, before he ruled and govern'd them as their *King*. The *Messiah* was to live for ever; but this was after he ^{*} *had made his soul an offering for sin*; after he had been first put to death by men, and raised by the power of God.

WHAT now is the application we should make of this discourse?

I. SINCE such was the *reception* which the *Son of God* found in the *world*, none of his *disciples* should think it *strange* if in the *world* they have *trouble*: ^y they should know *how to be abased*, and *how to abound*; be contented to go thro' good report, and thro' evil report; and to bear unjust and unfriendly usage; nor should they reckon they have any cause to condemn themselves or others merely upon this account. *Truth* may be opposed, and the greatest *integrity* of be-

^{*} *Isaiah* liii. 10.

^y *Philip*. iv. 12.

haviour be *misrepresented*; not only by the open enemies of truth and godliness, but by their *professed* friends; either out of *secret hatred* to that which they pretend to esteem and love, or from a *mistaken* judgment of men and things. Let the followers of Jesus be careful to secure this one point, of their own sincerity, and then not trouble themselves much about their present lot, nor censure others for theirs; remembering that the worst which can befall them, is better measure than was meted to their Lord and Master, ^a *who endured the contradiction of sinners*, was continually struggling with the prejudices and vices of the age he liv'd in, and especially towards the close of his life; ^a *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. Now ^b *the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord; it is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his Lord*. When we judge of our own character or happiness, or that of other men by outward appearances, suspecting that they cannot be good who fare ill, we are in some degree *offended in Christ*. If we have high notions of earthly greatness and riches, and cannot forbear envying such as possess them; if we are discontented with our condition, and ashamed of our meanness and poverty,

^a Heb. xii. 3.^a Isaiah liii. 3.^b Matt. x. 24, 25.

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poverty, when we have not brought ourselves into them; if we cannot forego the praise of men, and grow cool in the pursuit of truth, and the discharge of our duty, because we have not the advantage of being approv'd by others: if this be the case, tho' our christianity may be *sincere*, yet it must be own'd *imperfect*. Would we be perfect, we must come more heartily into the thoughts and measures of the blessed Jesus; if providence sees it fit, must not be uneasy to appear and act in a low condition as he did; must think ourselves compleatly adorned with the robes of righteousness, and as rich as we need be in the *fruits of the Spirit*. If we have this world's goods, we must not value ourselves upon them; but be infinitely better pleased with those things which we have in common with the poorest saints, than with those in which we share with the men of this world. We must cheerfully follow our Redeemer, be never ashamed nor afraid to own him, *glory in his cross*, think ourselves honoured in bearing his name, and much more in bearing his image; and choose rather to be reproached, calumniated, and ill-used, without deserving it, than to deserve a bad character, and come off with a good one.

2. WHEN we reflect on the *terrible* consequences of *ignorance*, and *passion*, and *pre-*

judice, of which we have an example in the reception the world gave our blessed Saviour; how they stifled all the motions of humanity, shut up the minds and hearts of men against the *truth*, and made them reject *wisdom* itself, addressing them in the person of Christ; let us be admonished to *watch* against the *influence* of these causes in *ourselves*, lest we be *found fighting against God*, by our opposition to any particular truth or duty of the gospel; or *persecuting Christ*, by injuring those who are his *members*, whether we allow them to be such or not, in their good name, or estate, or any other way. What a melancholly consideration is it, that *Christians* should imitate *blinded Jews*; and that much the same treatment as the Master met with from his avowed enemies, his followers should deal out one to the other? It is no excuse for acting thus, that herein they *think they do God good service*; for so were the *Jews* persuaded when they *crucified the Lord of life and glory*, and vex'd and persecuted his followers. But every party is ready to say in their own vindication, that *theirs* is not *passion*, and *prejudice*, and *uncharitableness*; but *zeal for the truth*, of which they know themselves to be in possession. And can we forbear making this obvious reflection; that

* John xvi. 2.

that since all parties allow this plea, at the same time that the *whole truth* can be but of *one* side, and most probably is to be found on *none*; therefore but one party, if one, can *justly* lay claim to it; and for this reason had much better be laid aside (together with the wicked practices which it is brought to defend) by *all*. And besides this, whoever happens to be *doctrinally* in the *right*, they who *persecute* others for their opinions, are sure to be *practically* in the *wrong*; and a *practical error* is always much more *dangerous* than a *merely doctrinal* one; the former shews an evil temper of mind, which the latter does not: but out of their great love to the true religion, men cannot bear that any should openly oppose and contradict it. If they should be ask'd, since they are by their own confession *fallible* as well as their neighbours, why may not the mistake be theirs? I doubt they would not be able to return a very satisfactory answer. But granting them what they contend for, that they are in the right, and others in the wrong; yet surely they must own, that one man with an *erroneous* understanding, may have a very *honest* heart; while another ^d *holds the truth in unrighteousness*. Now, wherever there is that ^e *honest and good heart*, there is always the *love* of the *truth*; and

Q 3

when

^d Rom. i. 18.^e Luke viii. 15.

when a man loves the truth, and diligently and impartially searches after it, is it just that he should be punish'd only because he does not find it? Is it not plain, that the persons who are for using an honest man and sincere christian after this manner, only because he is of *different* sentiments from them in disputable points, do not so much resemble their crucified Master as those who crucified him?

3. WAS the reception which our blessed Saviour found upon earth so indifferent, so directly contrary to what it ought to have been? let us then with the *more readiness* and *thankfulness* receive him in the *invitations* of the *gospel*, and the *ordinances* which he has instituted. Was it not for our sakes that he submitted to such indignities, and fell a sacrifice to the envy and hatred of the *Jews*? did not the sins of the world require this expiation, and raise the cloud which eclipsed *this sun of righteousness*? surely he may claim a higher place in our esteem and affection upon this very account. Let him not find our hearts barr'd against him; let none of us reject Christ, as in effect we do when we reject the offers of the gospel; as we reject the *offers* of the gospel in rejecting its *terms*. Let us not be guilty of *crucifying our Lord afresh*, putting him to *open shame*; which is constructively done by
 2 us,

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us, when we lead a wicked and ungodly life under a profession of religion. Christ invites us to come to him in the *sacrament of the supper*, and is ready to come to us; let us not turn a deaf ear to his invitations; or by our unpreparedness or indevotion cause him to absent himself from his table. Let us think with ourselves, how unspeakably great our obligations are to the Son of God, who bore the *hatred* of men, that he might at last become the object of their *love*. God forbid, he should fail of this most reasonable return from *us*! Let us make this use of the sufferings of our Redeemer, to have thereby our sense of his kindness and love to us heightened, and to be engaged in the firmest and most zealous adherence, and an everlasting fidelity to him. O how dear should the memory of this most excellent person be to us! and how much the dearer for his being contented to suffer so much on our account! Did an unbelieving world [†] *see no comeliness in him, that they should desire him?* the same sort of persons see no excellence and amiableness in virtue and goodness. If they had lov'd and esteem'd these, they would have had the highest value and affection for that person in whose example they shone with so much brightness, as they had never done in any other.

Q 4

Well,

[†] Isai. liii. 2.

Well, if this Jesus was *despised and rejected of men,*^s yet *to them who believe he is precious.* And for his sake, as well as from a regard to the advantages to be reaped from them, they will have the greater love for all the ordinances of the gospel: and if for all, then in a particular manner for the Lord's-supper, of which he is not only the *author*, but the immediate *object* and *end*.

To conclude, let it not be in vain to any of us, that Jesus Christ has done and suffered so much, in order to procure the *favour* of God for us, and to secure the *truth* of God to us. Let a religion sealed with the blood of its author, and of such great numbers of his immediate followers, meet with all that welcome entertainment from us which it deserves; and let us endeavour to live so as to silence the objections of wicked and unreasonable men against Christ and his gospel; that they may have no evil to say of us, or of the religion we profess, *beholding our good conversation in Christ.*

^s 1 Pet. ii. 7.

S E R-



S E R M O N IX.

The Nature of religious Joy.

PSAL. xcvii. 12.

Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous.—

RELIGION is no enemy to the happiness of mankind, witness this and a great many other passages of holy scripture, in which the affection we are invited and commanded to cherish and exercise, is joy; a thing so agreeable to all, that one would think at first sight there should be little occasion for such a precept. But it is not every kind of joy which is here intended; but that only which is *in the Lord, flowing from religion, or founded in it.* To this I doubt we are generally rather averse than inclin'd; which can proceed from nothing else but our having a *wrong notion* of this joy, or no *good title* to it, or not being in a *proper temper* of mind to relish it. I shall there-

therefore in treating these words make it my business to explain and prove the following Proposition or Doctrine, *viz.*

THAT to *rejoice in the Lord* is both the *privilege* and the *duty* of the *sincerely religious*.

To these the words of the text are address'd; *rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous*. By *righteousness* is sometimes understood in scripture the single virtue of *justice*; but the term *righteous* is, I believe, *always* used in a larger sense, or so as to signify persons of *universal* goodness and integrity; who, like ^a *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, are *righteous before God*, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*. The *righteousness* of such includes the whole of practical religion, a steady adherence to every part of their duty out of conscience towards God. Not that the *righteousness* of any mortal man would stand the test, if it was to be tried by the rule of *perfection*, and examined in the light of the divine knowledge and holiness; for alas! our virtues are exceeding defective at best, and ^b *in many things we offend all*. But such is the goodness and condescension of God, and such are the
gracious

^a Luke i. 6.

^b James iii. 2.

gracious terms of that new covenant which he has been pleased to make with the children of men ; that wheresoever *sincerity* or uprightness of heart is found, tho' not without many failings, no other *righteousness* is necessary to entitle us to his favour, through Jesus Christ, *in whom he hath made us accepted*. Let us remember then that the sincerely pious and good, those who fear and love God, and delight to do his will, are the persons whom the text calls upon to *rejoice in the Lord*.

THIS being premised, I shall now endeavour to show what is meant by our *rejoicing in the Lord* : and here these following particulars are included. It signifies our taking a *very sincere pleasure* in whatever concerns the *ever-blessed God* ; that this our joy is *superior* to all other joys ; that whatever *else* we rejoice in, we rejoice in *that manner* that our joy may *properly* be said to be *in the Lord* ; and, that our joy is to be *constant* and *permanent*.

I. OUR *rejoicing in the Lord*, denotes our taking a *very sincere* and *cordial pleasure* in those things which concern the *ever-blessed God* ; particularly his *existence*, *perfections*, and *providence* ; the *discoveries* of his *will* to us in his *word* ; the *interest* we have in him, and the *relations* we stand in to him ; his continual

tinual *protection*, *guidance*, and *influence*; his gracious *intercourses* with us in the duties of religious worship; and finally, the *hope* he has given us of *fulness of joy* in his beatific and most glorious presence above.

1. *REJOICING in the Lord*, signifies that *cordial pleasure*, which the serious and devout mind takes in the *meditation* of God's *existence*, *perfection*, and *providence*. He hears God saying by the mouth of the *prophet*, *I am, and there is none besides me*; to which he readily replies, " *Lord, I believe,*
 " *I see that thou art*, and I have great joy
 " and *peace in believing!* I can no more
 " reasonably doubt of thy being, than I
 " can of my own; and am not more pleas'd
 " in *feeling myself to be*, than in *knowing*
 " *that thou art*: yea, my own existence
 " would afford me but little satisfaction, if
 " I did not consider it as a proof of thine,
 " and as thy free, thy bounteous gift, which
 " thou hast bestowed with no other design,
 " than that I might be happy: for alas!
 " could it once be supposed there is no
 " God, no first and self-existent Cause, no
 " all-perfect Being, no Creator of the
 " world, how dark and uncomfortable
 " would be the prospect of the world about
 " me! The heavens would lose all their
 " glory, the earth all its beauty. To think
 " that

“ that I was the work of *chance*, and not
 “ of *wisdom* and *design* ; that my entrance
 “ into the world depended as little upon
 “ the will of any *superior Being*, as it did
 “ upon *my own*, and so likewise my depar-
 “ ture out of it : this would quickly put me
 “ out of love with life, and make me ^d *praise*
 “ *the dead* ; *who are already dead*, more than
 “ *the living*, *who art yet alive* ; yea, and to
 “ conclude, *that better is he than both they*
 “ *who has not yet been*, and never will be,
 “ *to see the evil work that is done under*
 “ *the sun*. Instead of saying, that *all is*
 “ *very good*, I should be tempted to say,
 “ that all was *very evil*, if there was no
 “ *original fountain of good* from which all
 “ things proceeded.”

AGAIN, the pious man is wonderfully
 delighted when he hears God saying, “ *I am*
that I am, beyond all comparison *great* and
good, *glorious* and *happy*, and *unchangeably*
so. Give me leave to say, “ O Lord, that
 “ I do in some measure enjoy the riches
 “ and fulness of thy most adorable essence,
 “ and take part in thy felicity, thou hast
 “ made it my duty, ^f *to rejoice with them who*
 “ *rejoice*, and thro’ thy grace I am able to
 “ say, I rejoice with my *fellow-creatures*, but
 “ not so much as I rejoice with *my Creator* in
 “ the survey of his infinite perfections ; my
 heart

^d Eccles. iv. 2, 3.

^e Exod. iii. 14.

^f Rom. xii. 15.

“ heart is glad as often as I reflect and consider, that there is a supreme and most excellent Being, in whose idea *all perfection* is contain'd ; who fills all space, is possessed of all power, knows all things, and orders and disposes of them according to the counsel of his own will.”

God rules in the armies of heaven above, and among the inhabitants of the earth below : he governs the world he hath made. “ And

“ O ! saith the good man, were I never so wise, or mighty, or rich ; much wiser, mightier, or richer than any of the sons of men are ; yet would I not glory in my riches, in my might, in my wisdom ; but in this only, ^h *that I know the Lord, who exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, and delighteth in these things.* I can now look about me with pleasure ; and whatever *seeming* disorders there may be in the course of things, I am not at all disturb'd about it, nor concerned to have things better managed and disposed than they are ; because I know the world is under the guidance of unerring wisdom, and the care of a most kind and watchful providence : not like a ship in the wide sea of time, tofs'd up and down without a pilot, directed to no certain haven, and every
“ moment

^g Dan. iv. 35.

^h Jerem. ix. 23, 24.

“ moment in danger of being swallowed
“ up and lost.” In all this the piously disposed are the very reverse of wicked and ungodly men. ⁱ *The fool, i. e. the habitual, the desperate, and the hardened sinner, hath said in his heart there is no God ; he would fain persuade himself there is no such Being : he secretly wishes there were not, and therefore best approves the atheistical scheme, which derives the world itself, and all that is done in it, from a blind necessity, and unmeaning chance* ^k *Is not God, saith he, in the height of the heavens, how then can he know ? can he judge through the dark cloud ? either there is no God, or if there be, he lives remote from the abodes of mortal men. The ground of such reasonings is, that these wretched men fear and hate God as their enemy ; and therefore if they were able would exclude him from all knowledge of, and all concern in the affairs of the world. On the contrary, holy souls have a superlative love to God, founded in their likeness to him, and hope in his mercy ; and love and hope produce joy in the possessions, the excellencies, and the blessedness of that glorious Being, who is the object of their love and hope. So that all upright minds do, as it were, naturally rejoice in the contemplation of the divine Being and perfections ; but not*
all

ⁱ Psal. xiv. 1.^k Job xxii. 12, 13.

all in the *same degree*, and hardly any in such a degree as they might. On this account there is room enough for such an exhortation to the most eminent saints, who should have God more in their thoughts, should meditate more frequently, and more intensely on his awful and his amiable attributes, and call upon their souls to rejoice in God, and in his providence, inspection and government of the world.

2. *Rejoicing in the Lord*, signifies our receiving a *very great delight* from the *discoveries* of his will to us in his *word*. That God should be pleased to make known himself to sinful creatures as we are, any otherwise than by the works of *creation*, and the dictates of *natural conscience*; that he should ¹ *speak at sundry times, and in divers manners to the fathers by the prophets*, having chosen to himself from the corrupt mass of the *idolatrous world* a *church* or people, to whom he very early communicated his will by extraordinary revelations, and committed his holy oracles, the sacred scriptures; which being given ^m *by inspiration of God, are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*: that besides and after all his other messengers, he should at last send his *own son*, in order to declare his own counsel, what

¹ Heb. i. 1.

^m 2 Tim. iii. 16.

what he expects and requires from us, and what he intends to do for us, and to be equally the instructor and redeemer of all who believe in him : this surely is very just matter of joy. And whoever he be that truly rejoices in God, he will unfeignedly rejoice in all the manifestations which this great and sovereign Being has been pleased to make of his ⁿ *good, and perfect, and acceptable will*; for such he accounts the will of God to be. The *righteous*, who liv'd in the *Psalmist's* time, did so ; and much more may *they* be supposed thus to rejoice, who *see the canon of scripture compleated*. The will of God, as *we* are favour'd with the knowledge of it, may well be stiled his *perfect will*; the *gospel* giving a *fuller* revelation than was ever before vouchsafed of the secrets of heaven, a more intire summary of all things necessary and expedient for us to know and do, in order to our obtaining eternal felicity : so perfect indeed, that no new revelation is to be expected, till that which is called the ^o *day of revelation* is come ; when we shall be judg'd for our use and improvement of all God's discoveries of himself to us. And because the will of God is thus *perfect*, the sincere christian reckons it *good and acceptable* ; *good* for him, and highly worthy of his *acceptance*, as well as a declaration of the

ⁿ Rom. xii. 2.^o Rom. ii. 5.

good-will of God to man, and his readiness to accept us on the terms of the gospel :

“ O blessed be God for such a rule ! blef-
 “ sed be God who has ^p shown me what is
 “ good, and what he requires of me, that I
 “ may be certain of his gracious regard ! I
 “ acknowledge that his ^q commandments are
 “ holy, just, and good ; ^r his testimonies have I
 “ taken for an heritage for ever, they are
 “ the rejoicing of my heart. I see God in
 “ his word, as well as in his works ; in the
 “ holiness of his precepts ; and the goodness of
 “ his promises ; as well as in the warmth
 “ and splendor of the sun, the exact order
 “ and harmony in which all things are dis-
 “ pos’d, and their manifest subserviency to
 “ the pleasure and happiness of sensitive and
 “ intelligent beings. ^t O how I love thy
 “ law ! it is my meditation day and night.
 “ I love to trace thy footsteps wherever
 “ I can find them, and in thy word I find
 “ them mark’d with no less plainness than
 “ in the frame of heaven and earth : here,
 “ while ^t I behold thy glory, I am changed in-
 “ to the same image from glory to glory.”

3. OUR rejoicing in the Lord, imports our rejoicing in the interest which he has been graciously pleased to give his people in himself ; and in those comfortable and honourable relations

^p Mic. vi. 8. ^q Rom. vii. 12 ^r Psal cxix. 111.
^t Psal. cxix. 97. ^t 2 Cor. iii. 18.

tions which we stand in to him. After we have meditated on the greatness, the majesty, and the all-sufficiency of God; have considered the wonders of his hand, and the boundless benevolence and compassions of his heart, to be able to add as the *Psalmist* does, *" This God is our God,* may well transport the soul, which is allowed to make use of this appropriating language. This God, whom *" the heaven of heavens cannot contain,* and in all its brightness does but faintly represent; this God, who ** calleth the stars by their names,* *† maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire,* and employs all the seasons, and all the elements to *‡ fulfil his word:* this God, whose *§ wisdom is unsearchable, and his works past finding out,* who is the *best friend,* and the *most formidable enemy,* in the whole world, because both his friendship and enmity are attended by almighty Power; *this God is our God:* not barely by an *external* title or covenant, (tho' this is a very great privilege and honour, and may be made a step to much greater) but by a free and full gift of himself to us as *our portion and felicity,* by receiving us into his special favour, granting us not only the names of sons and daughters, but certain peculiar rights and

R 2

privi-

u Psal. xlviii. 14. *w* 1 Kings viii. 27. *x* Psal. cxlviii. 8.
cxlvii. 4. *y* Psal. civ. 4. *z* Psal. cxlviii. 8.
a Job v. 9.

privileges, which are in themselves invaluable. His *Spirit* may, in some sense, be said *to witness with our spirits* that we are his children. “ To be thy servants, O Lord, “ is honour enough, and more than enough “ for us sinful dust and ashes ; to enjoy, tho’ “ the lowest place in thy household ; to be “ employed, tho’ in the meanest office ; and “ to receive any, tho’ the most inconfi- “ derable marks of thine acceptance ! We “ must say, ’tis more than we deserve to have “ thy *creatures* assign’d us as our portion ; “ to be able to call any thing ours, any “ comfort or enjoyment, of how little value “ soever. ^b *The earth hast thou given to the “ children of men ; and hadst thou given no- “ thing better, nothing else, thou wouldest “ have exceeded their merits. Lord, what “ then shall we say, or what can we think “ of the greatness of thy bounty, and the “ happiness of our condition, when thou “ makest us thy children, callest us near to “ thy throne ; and not judging the whole “ world, with all its treasures, to be a suf- “ ficient testimony of thy love, bestowest “ thine infinite self upon us ? This is the “ portion of our inheritance, and we rejoice “ and glory in it. Now we are rich, now “ we are full, now we have all, and abound : “ for having given us thyself, thou canst “ not*

^b Psal. cxv. 16.

“ not be unkind to us, shouldst thou deny us
 “ every thing else ; whereas we know that
 “ having ^c *given us thy Son*, and, for his
 “ sake, given us thyself, thou wilt not with-
 “ hold any thing that is needful and conve-
 “ nient for us.” This is *rejoicing in the Lord*,
 and certainly no joy can have a better foun-
 dation.

4. WE *rejoice in the Lord*, when we rejoice
 in his *continual protection, guidance and in-
 fluence*. His *universal providence* was men-
 tioned before, here I intend his *peculiar care*.
Our God will be our guide and our guardian ;
 he will ^d *lead us in the way everlasting* ; and
 wheresoever we are, will defend us by his
 favourable care, ^e *will give his angels charge
 concerning us, to keep us in all our ways*, i. e.
 he will do this, provided ^f *in all our ways we
 acknowledge him*, and take heed to our steps,
 that they do not swerve from the way of
 our duty : with this only condition, that we
 be *found in the way of righteousness*, we are
 intitled to the divine protection and blessing.
 He will *uphold us* that we shall not *slide*, so
 as to *fall* ; and with his *favour* as with a
shield surrounding us on every side, will in-
 tercept and turn away all the numberless evils
 which threaten us. Persons who are to
 travel in a long and intricate way, are glad

R 3 when

^c Rom. viii. 32. ^d Psal. cxxxix. 24. ^e Psal.
 xci. 11. ^f Prov. iii. 6.

when they meet with an experienced and faithful guide; and if bands of robbers or of wild and ravenous beasts do likewise infest the road, choose to travel under a guard, if they can be at the expence of it. Our way to the heavenly *Canaan* lies thro' a waste and howling wilderness, in which there are a thousand crossing paths, cover'd with darkness, fill'd with dangers, beset by creatures which lie in wait to devour, by the insidious serpent, and the roaring lion, and by concealed enemies, who are ever ready to assault us unawares: but that which lends us courage and assurance is, that we march under the conduct of infinite wisdom; that the eye of God is constantly upon us, his hand leads us, and his all-encompassing arm supports and defends us. We may apply here these words of the *Psalmist*, ^g *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet*: or those words of our Saviour to his disciples; ^h *Behold, I give unto you power to tread on scorpions and on serpents, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you*. We may use these words in a figurative and lower sense, to illustrate the present subject. Well may we triumph, having such a refuge always near. ⁱ *The Lord*

is

^g Psal. xci. 12.
cxxxix. 3.

^h Luke x. 19.

ⁱ Psal.

is ever about our path, he knoweth our lying down, and our rising up, he is acquainted with all our ways; and ^k because he is at our right-hand, therefore we shall not be greatly moved: ^l though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet we will fear no evil, while his rod and his staff comfort us. There is the protection of the divine Providence, and the protection of divine Grace, in which the good man can rejoice: to one he owes his bodily safety and comfort; to the other, the security and happiness of his better part. And this is what he chiefly prizes, even that protection and guidance which is *internal*; those secret influences of God's Spirit, those seasonable and sufficient supplies of *strength* and *fortitude*, of *light* and *peace*, which he experiences in the course of his life. " O I cannot express
 " the sense I have of my happiness herein!
 " and yet I must confess I am not so sensible
 " of it as I ought to be; that in all places I
 " am under the protection of heaven, and
 " at *all times* his special charge and care,
 " and never without his presence, as long as
 " I know how to value, and take heed not
 " to forfeit it! While I am *with God*, he is
 " *with me*; while I implore his help, listen to
 " his instructions, and obey his voice, I shall
 " always hear a voice saying, *This is the way,*
 " *walk therein*; ^m *in the hidden part he will*

R 4

" make

^k Psal. xvi. 8. ^l Psal. xxiii. 4. ^m Psal. li. 6.

“ *make me to know wisdom, and^a deliver me*
 “ *from all my fears.* What was dark and
 “ doubtful, shall become clear; what was
 “ difficult, easy; *the rough ways shall be made*
 “ *smooth; the crooked, strait; and mountains*
 “ *be levelled to a plain.*” This, as long as
 they walk humbly with God, is the happy con-
 dition of all his people, who are continually
 encompassed, penetrated, and fill’d with his
 gracious presence, and repose themselves
 with entire confidence and satisfaction under
 the shadow of his wings.

5. *Rejoicing in his gracious intercourses*
with us in the duties of divine worship, is an-
 other thing intended by *rejoicing in the Lord.*
 When we delight in approaching to God,
 and in the assurance we have that he will
 “ *draw nigh to us, and bless us,* ^p *and lift up*
the light of his countenance upon us. We reckon
 the society of *other men* to be a very great
 advantage, a chief part of the happiness of
 this life, as indeed it is: for who of us could
 endure a state of perfect solitude, to be se-
 cluded from all human converse; and, as if
 we were *free among the dead, to behold man*
no more with the inhabitants of the world?
 this would be uncomfortable, and to many
 persons insupportable. Whereas now, that
 men live together in neighbourhoods, enter
 into friendly contracts and communications
 with

^a Psal. xxxiv. 4.

^o James iv. 8.

^p Psal. iv. 6.

with one another, and have opportunities of meeting together and enjoying each other's company and conversation, they spend life much more agreeably, and, if it be not their own fault, more usefully too than they could otherwise do. But there is *another* society of a much *nobler* kind, and attended with *diviner* pleasures; and that is, of the *faithful* with *one another*, and with *God*; their fellowship in the ordinances of the gospel, and the privileges of God's house. What would the dearest delights of human society be to the heaven-born soul, were it shut out from these? There is a pleasure in hearing the voice of *man*; but, O how much sweeter is the voice of *God*! The *common* intercourses of life have something very entertaining; the hours which are spent by *cordial friends* together are still more delightful and improving: but of all social delights, the most elevating are those which the devout soul perceives in *conversing* with the *supreme* object of its affection; in praying to God, and praising his name, attending in his house, and sitting at his table, hearing his word, and feasting on the memorials of his love; especially at some brighter and happier seasons, when the mind is serene, the heart enlarg'd, the affections melting; when the christian, having walked strictly and circumspectly, baffled tempta-

temptations to sin, and made a sensible progress in religion, has greater ⁹ *confidence towards God*, and humbly claims the accomplishment of his promises. When God enters and fills the soul, bids it be of good cheer, and by his Spirit raises, enlightens, purifies, and comforts it; then the soul can look down with contempt upon all the world, as most fair and glittering, and disregard alike its flatteries and frowns; then it longs to have the veil drawn aside, and is not unwilling to leave the body that its joy may be full: for if the enjoyment of God in his ordinances here below yields so much pleasure, what must the satisfaction be of seeing his face, and enjoying the communications of his love in a more perfect manner? Which leads me to the next particular.

6. ^r *The lively hope, to which all those are begotten, who love God, of fulness of joy at his right hand, and of rivers of pleasure for ever-more, makes them to rejoice in the Lord with joy unspeakable.* What I know of God now is not the *utmost* of what I shall know of him, but rather the *least part* of it. Nothing that I have yet enjoy'd fills up the meaning of God's condescending titles and most precious promises. No, the *harvest* is yet *behind*; the day does but yet *dawn*; I have yet but glimpses, and those

⁹ 1 John iii. 21. ^r 1 Pet. i. 3. Psal. xvi. 11.

those too tranſient ones of God's reconciled countenance : the motions of love on my part are languid, and the manifeſtations of the divine love to me imperfect. “ True, “ O Lord, all theſe are delightful, better “ far than any earthly joys whatſoever “ without them ; the foretaſtes and firſt “ fruits are welcome ; welcome are the “ firſt rays of the opening morn, the leaſt “ ſnatches of the bleſſed fight tempt my “ eager ſoul to *follow hard after thee* ; the “ exerciſes of holy love are their own “ reward, and to be equalled by no other “ joys but thoſe which flow from the diſplays “ and tokens of thine ! But O when I “ ſhall ſee thee, the original of beauty, the “ fountain of light and life, the ſupreme “ pattern of all perfection ; when I ſhall ^f *ſee thee as thou art* ; when ^t *in thy light I ſhall ſee light* ; when I ſhall gather *immortal* “ fruits from the *tree of knowledge*, and “ ^u *the tree of life* in the *paradiſe* above, “ and drink my fill of bliſs at the *fountain* “ *head* ; when the veil ſhall be taken “ from *my eyes*, and from thy ſmiling and “ glorious *face* ; when I ſhall be made “ ^w *perfect in love*, and the divine paſſion “ ſhall be continually acting and reacting, “ darting like the beams of the ſun from “ the

^f 1 John iii. 2.
xxii. 1, 2.

^t Pſal. xxxvi. 9.
^w 1 Cor. xiii. 8,---10.

^u Revel.

“ the *father* of *lights* on my soul, and from
“ my soul reflected and returned again to
“ the father of lights; then, then shall
“ I confess my self to be happy indeed,
“ and that all I knew of satisfaction and
“ pleasure before, was no more compar’d
“ with this, than a drop of water to the
“ whole ocean; a single ray of light to
“ the immense body of the sun. And if
“ such will be my happiness hereafter, is
“ not that alone a reason for my rejoicing
“ now? since the *possession* of the whole
“ inheritance will make me perfectly blef-
“ sed, should not the hope of it be plea-
“ sing and entertaining, tho’ in a lesser de-
“ gree? Yes, O my soul, thou knowest it
“ is; * *I rejoice in hope of the glory of God*,
“ and will rejoice. I judge of my happiness
“ not so much by my actual *enjoyments*, as
“ by my *hopes*; and provided my hopes of
“ heaven are bright, and strong, and over-
“ flowing, I will ask no more, knowing
“ that I can enjoy no more till hope is
“ chang’d into fruition. That blessed state
“ of things is at no great distance; after a
“ few breaths and pulses more I shall enter
“ upon a state of existence, which has no
“ such indications of weakness and decay;
“ no such short measures and divisions of its
“ duration; yea, properly no measures, no
“ divi-

* Rom. v. 2.

“ divisions at all, because it is unmeasurable
 “ and infinite. The ^y *life* to come is eter-
 “ *nal*, the blessedness of heaven has no
 “ period, ^z *the crown of glory fadeth not*
 “ *away*. And O when this character of
 “ the promised bliss is added to all the rest,
 “ that it is *eternal*, and God is pleased to
 “ afford me some good hope of a part in
 “ these ineffable and eternal delights, me-
 “ thinks I am not able to contain my joy ;
 “ my soul stretches its thoughts into that
 “ future blessed world, and with its desires
 “ and expectations seizeth the *prize* which
 “ is *set before me !*”

THIS is a short account of the first thing
 intended by *rejoicing in the Lord* ; namely,
 our taking a very sincere pleasure in what-
 ever relates to the blessed God, his existence,
 perfections, providence ; the discoveries of
 his will to us in his word ; the interest
 we have in him, and the relations wherein
 we stand to him ; his continual protection,
 guidance, and influence ; his gracious inter-
 courses with us in the duties of religious
 worship ; and finally, the hope he has given
 us of fulness of joy in his beatifick and most
 glorious presence.

II. *Rejoicing in the Lord*, signifies that our
 joy in God is *superior to all our other joys* ;
 otherwise it is a joy unworthy of *him*, and

no

^y Matt. xxv. 46.

^z 1 Pet. v. 4.

no way, or not savingly, profitable to *us*. We can build nothing on such a feeble joy ; we have no ground to regard that joy as a *grace* and *fruit of the Spirit*, which is extinguished by the joys and pleasures of sense ; or so suppress'd and over-power'd by them, as to have no considerable and lasting effect. When in some sense, and in some degree we *rejoice* in God, or Jesus Christ, but *rejoice more* in other things, and hereby declare our preference of these to the love and favour of God ; when our *joy* of a religious kind is so little as to leave us poor and uncomfortable, faint with hunger and thirst, if we have not other pleasures to gratify the longings of our sense, and to fill up the vacant room within ; when, finally, our religious *joy* and satisfactions, such as they are, are sacrificed and thrown away for the delights of sin ; when, if we cannot reconcile our delight in God with the pleasure we have in pursuing our worldly projects and designs, and gratifying the appetites and inclinations of the flesh, and in hunting after the favour and praise of men, we are contented to go without that spiritual delight, and take up with these grosser satisfactions instead of it : alas, in all these cases it is but too plain that we are not in the number of those *who rejoice in the Lord*. No, that is another sort of *joy* ; a
joy

joy which has the preheminance above all other entertainments, in the esteem and choice of those who possess it ; who, though they may, upon some occasions, be more sensibly mov'd by things which have a relation to their bodily passions, yet, in their deliberate thoughts, always value those divine delights above them ; and if they must forego one or other, are never at a loss with which to part : a *joy* as much exceeding other joys as the waters of a pure chrystal stream do those of a standing pool, which are corrupted and fill'd with mire and dirt ; or wines of the richest flavour the most insipid draughts. That he may secure these better pleasures, the pious man is willing to deny himself the pleasures which sinners meet with, or fancy they shall meet with in carnal gratifications ; nay, he hardly thinks this to be self-denial, when he should deny himself so much more by losing the pleasures of virtue and religion, of a good conscience and sublime devotion : so that the ungodly are very much in the wrong, to think that the temperance and moderation of true christians, their hatred of sin, and contempt of all its allurements, are owing to a deadness and insensibility of soul, to their not being made for *joy*, and having no capacity to relish it ; as grateful liquors and harmonious sounds are lost upon persons

persons who have no taste or ear for them. This is not the reason of the christians shunning the baits of sensual pleasure ; he is not that gloomy, senseless, stupid creature, which he is reckon'd among the giddy and unthinking part of the *species* : on the contrary, he has a *quicker* taste of *true* happiness than others, and is a much better judge of it ; for he preserves the desires and inclinations of his nature more pure and undepraved, and therefore if he despises some sorts of pleasure, it is because he has others which he prizes much more, and which are really much more valuable ; if he avoids some pleasures which the greater part of mankind run after, it is not because he *does not* know them, but because he *does*, much better than they who call themselves, and are usually known in the world, by the name of the *men of pleasure*. He knows them to be ensnaring and defiling, mixt and transient ; and when compared with those more exalted and satisfying pleasures, of which they would deprive him, rendering him at once *unworthy* and *incapable* of *enjoying* them, of no worth and significance at all. And certainly this is not acting like one who has *no notion* of pleasure ; but as one who has the *best*, the *truest notion* of it, and the fairest *title* to it. This then is the *second* particular descriptive of *religious joy* ;
it

it is superior in those who are possess'd of it to all other joys.

III. WHATEVER else we *rejoice* in, we are to *rejoice* in *such a manner* as that we may be properly said to *rejoice in the Lord*, even when other things are the *immediate* occasions of our *joy*. - - - But of this and other parts of this subject, in my next discourse.





S E R M O N X.

Rejoicing in the Lord the Privilege
of the Righteous.

P S A L. XCVII. 12.

Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous.--

I N the preceding discourse on these words, I undertook to explain and prove this proposition, *That to rejoice in the Lord, is both the privilege and the duty of the sincerely religious.* In order to this I endeavoured,

I. To show you what is *meant* by our *rejoicing in the Lord.* The following particulars are included in it.

I. OUR *rejoicing in the Lord* denotes our taking a very *sincere* and *cordial* pleasure in whatever *relates* to the *ever blessed-God*; particularly his existence, perfections, and providence; the discoveries of his will to us, especially

especially in his word ; the interest we have in him, and the relations wherein we stand to him ; his continual protection, guidance and influence ; his gracious intercourse with us in the duties of *religious worship* ; and, finally, the hope he has given us of fullness of *joy*, in his beatific and most glorious presence above.

II. *Rejoicing in the Lord* signifies that our *joy* in God is *superior* to *all our other joys* : otherwise it is a *joy* unworthy of him, and no way, or not savingly, profitable to us. These two particulars I have treated.

III. WHATEVER else we *rejoice* in, we are to *rejoice* in *such a manner*, that we may be *properly* said to *rejoice in the Lord*, even when other things are the *immediate* occasions of our *joy*. The God we serve is not an envious and malevolent Being, but exceeding liberal and kind : he has created us with an unextinguishable *desire* after happiness, as a secret intimation that he *intends* to make us happy, if we do not make ourselves miserable ; and while our principal happiness is lodged in himself, and to be found no where else, (in which he has shown the singular regard he has to our

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nature.)

nature), he feeds our hearts with a thousand little *rivulets* of joy and *satisfaction* from *created* objects: our bodies are endow'd with a variety of senses and appetites, and our souls with powers and faculties of their own; nor was any one sense or faculty made in vain, or to lie always idle and useless; but every sense, and much more every mental faculty, has not one, but a great number of things provided to entertain it. But then the *soul* is not to *lose itself* in this maze and labyrinth of delight; it is not by this *variety* to be *diverted* from that *one infinite Good*, who eminently contains in himself all the various kinds and degrees of true joy. In the *ordinary course* of his life, and in all those *enjoyments* which he has in *common* with other men, the christian's joy is to *differ* from theirs; his joy, as well as his *sorrow*, is to be ^a *after a godly sort*, and such as to show that God is the *utmost object* of his thoughts, his pursuits, and of all his agreeable perceptions; when lower and even sensible things are the *direct* object of them, by which means he *continually rejoices in God*. Here it may be of service to the christian, if I state this matter a little more distinctly.

I. W E

^a 2 Cor. vii. 11.

I. WE rejoice in the Lord in the use and enjoyment of *other* things, by considering those things which yield us an innocent satisfaction, as the *gifts of God*, the *effects* of his *unbounded munificence*, and the *marks* of his *creative* and *providential goodness*. Thus we should rejoice in the bounties of nature, and the blessings of providence; in any advantages of body, or endowments of mind. These things afford a reasonable ground of satisfaction, because we are hereby farther removed from a state of want and penury than others are to whom these good things are denied. But while the rain falls, and the sun shines, and the earth, alike refresh'd by the prolific moisture of the one, and the genial warmth of the other, smiles all around us; first *promising* us an abundant increase in the verdure and blossoms of the spring, and then making good what it promised in the fruits of summer, and the plenty of autumn; shall we forget by *whose order* the sun shines, and the clouds are raised, and filled and wafted along the sky, and then empty themselves again upon the earth; whose bosom he hath stor'd with innumerable seeds and principles of things? Shall we be unmindful of him who ^b *gives us fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*; or who at least does not

S 3

punish

^b Acts xiv. 17.

punish us with a barrenness any way proportioned to our own? If we are distinguished by any favourable circumstance in our birth, or education, or place, or condition in life; shall we not regard the *good-will* of him who has distinguished us? if we have friends who are sincere and faithful, who divide our sorrows, and double our joys, are able to advise, and ready to relieve us; if we have a good name, a competency, if not an abundance of worldly wealth; in short, if we possess any thing whereby life is made more easy and comfortable to us, and we are rendered capable of greater usefulness to others; shall we not call to mind *whose* gifts all these things are? or while we rejoice in the *gifts*, shall we not much more rejoice in the *giver*? should not every blessing be a motive to *gratitude*? is not *gratitude* to God the proper language of the joy we take in any creature comfort?

2. OUR *joy in the Lord* should be the *chief spring* of our joy in all the blessings and advantages with which his goodness hath supplied us. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.* The question upon which all the happiness of my life turns is this: "Am I in a state of acceptance with God; has he pardoned my

“ my
“ Eccles. ix. 7.

“ my sins ? can I rejoice in him as my por-
 “ tion ? if so, I have nothing that should
 “ disturb my enjoyment of any of the al-
 “ lowable comforts and pleasures of life.
 “ The rose is not guarded by thorns, nor does
 “ the honey conceal a secret sting : I may
 “ now take the sweet of every enjoyment,
 “ and my heart run over with a pure and
 “ genuine delight.” The ^d *curse* of God is
 upon the *wicked* man, and all that he has ;
 he is *curst* in his basket and in his store, in
 his coming in and in his going out : and while
 this *curse* remains, it blasts every enjoyment,
 so that it cannot possibly yield any sincere
 satisfaction ; and could afford no pleasure at
 all, if the wicked man were not stupified
 and insensible. On the other hand, the
 righteous are the *blessed of the Lord* : he
 blesteth their *persons* and *habitations*, in
 which ^e *are found joy and gladness, thank-*
giving and the voice of melody ; and no won-
 der, while God himself is there. This se-
 cret blessing of the Almighty, this love of
 God, and peace with him, give a grateful
 taste to that which has little or no relish of
 its own, and exalt the meanest delights ; it
 being with the soul in this case, as with the
 senses of tasting and smelling, when they
 are prepossessed with some delicious flavour,
 or agreeable scent, every taste and smell

S 4

par-

^d Prov. iii. 33.^e Isa. li. 3.

participates of the pleasing sensation. Thus the soul, which joys in God, brings to the fruition of every blessing and comfort that prevailing sweetness within, that reigning contentment, that diffusive gladness and tranquillity through all its powers, as makes it enjoy a great deal of satisfaction in it, whether it finds it there or no.

3. THE good man's joy in the Lord regulates his joy and delight in other things; being at once an *incentive* to it as far as it is lawful, and a *restraint* upon it when it would pass beyond its proper bounds. "Let me rejoice, but let me rejoice as a reasonable creature, and as a christian, with moderation and sobriety, so as not to lose the command of my self; to be vain and foolish, and idly transported; to give the reins to a passion, which however pleasing, should not be suffered to hurry reason away with it, and to make me use those liberties which are against the rules of temperance or charity; whereby I my self may offend, or cause my brother to offend." Then do we rejoice in the Lord, when we are mindful of this rule, to ^e rejoice, as if we rejoiced not; to use the world as not abusing it: to avoid all fondness for the pleasures of the animal life, all attachment to them, all unreasonable and ungovern'd mirth, all levity of beha-

behaviour ; in a word, all those things which would lessen our character as *christians*, and destroy that respect which we should endeavour to preserve in the minds of others for *their sakes*, and for the sake of *religion*, as well as *our own*.

4. THEN do we *rejoice in the Lord*, when our *other joys lift our hearts to him*, are considered and improv'd as *motives to greater diligence and zeal in serving him here, and increase our desires of enjoying him hereafter*. Can I knowingly and willingly offend that God, of whose goodness I daily participate ; ^s *who giveth me all things richly to enjoy* ? shall I not serve and glorify that God with the entire strength of my nature, to whom I owe every joyous perception, of which my nature is capable ? My joy, as I observed before, whatever the *immediate* occasion of it be, should produce gratitude to the Author of my being, who has made me for pleasure, and forbids me none but what is hurtful : and I now add, my gratitude should manifest itself in the cheerfulness of my obedience, and in my delight to imitate God in his goodness ; like holy *Job*, who in the days of his prosperity, ^h *when the candle of the Lord shone upon his head ; when he wash'd his steps in butter, and the rock poured him out rivers of oil ; was* not

^s 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^h Job xxix. 3 - - - 17.

not for monopolizing the gifts of providence, nor for *eating his morsel alone*, but admitted others into a share of his plenty; was kind and compassionate to them, and ready to assist them; *was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.* The heart which God has filled with gladness, should overflow with humanity and good-will to all the children of want and sorrow: and while we receive joy in *any way*, and from *any object* whatsoever, we should have our thoughts conducted to God, and our desires after him, and delight in him increased. “If God has fitted
“other things to give me pleasure, what
“must be the pleasure which *he himself* can,
“and does give to those who enjoy him? If
“in this world of sin, this state of trial, I
“have so many comforts; if even here I am
“oftner call'd to rejoicing, than to mourn-
“ing; to giving of thanks than to confession
“and humiliation; how numerous, how per-
“fect, how uninterrupted will my *joy* be in
“that better world, where all sin will cease,
“and all *sighing and sorrow shall flee away?*”
This is the third particular, our *rejoicing in the Lord* imports, that whatever else we *rejoice* in, we *rejoice* after *such a manner*, that it may *properly* be said to be *in the Lord*. And since the *Lord*, in whom we are commanded to *rejoice*,

rejoice, is the *everlasting* God, *unchangeable* in all his perfections, and in his love and regard to the upright ; and since the *soul* which *rejoices* in God, is also *immortal*, I therefore add,

IV. OUR *rejoicing in the Lord*, to be *worthy* of him, must be *constant and permanent* : it must not vary as our outward circumstances vary, but subsist the same in all the changes of life. Some may be ready to ask, are we to understand this exhortation as seasonable at all times ? without any exception of times of adversity and distress ? is it *reasonable*, is it *possible*, to rejoice in *some* circumstances ? Yes ; forasmuch as the *object* is ever the same, and so likewise the *principal ground* of our joy ; the alteration we may undergo in some things of lesser moment and extra-essential to our happiness, must not make a change here. When we are cut short of other joys, yet we must *rejoice in the Lord*. The streams of other joys may fail ; but this, like some springs which keep running in the drought of summer, must be perpetual. Accordingly St. Paul charges the christian converts to whom he writes, that they should ⁱ *rejoice in the Lord always* ; and that they should ^k *rejoice evermore ; giving thanks always for all things to God, even the father, in the name of our Lord*

ⁱ Philip, iv. 4. ^k 1 Thess. v. 16, 18. Eph. v. 20.

Lord Jesus Christ. Joy is very near akin to *thanksgiving*, and seldom, if ever, separated from it: and it seems christians are to *give thanks always for all things*. This may be strange language to others; but is not so to them, who are taught that ¹ *all things are theirs, and work together for their good*; and who know that God is always the same wise, gracious, faithful, and all-sufficient Being, ^m *without the least variableness, or shadow of turning*, whatever *diversity* there may be in the *external* scenes of providence. It may be we are *deprived of health*, or perhaps have *trouble in the world*; however that be, we are still to *rejoice in God*.

I. ARE we *deprived of health*? It must be own'd, that health is one of the greatest blessings of life, a sort of fundamental blessing, without which all others are of little value; for what relish can attend the other enjoyments of life, where health is wanting? This shows that nothing of this world can compensate for the absence of health; because whatever we have of the world, if we have not health, tho' we *possess*, yet we cannot truly *enjoy* it. But tho' no worldly blessing is an equivalent for health, it does not follow there is nothing else which can be so accounted. Tho' we cannot enjoy the *world*, unless we enjoy health too, it does not there-
fore

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 22. Rom. viii. 28.

^m James i. 17.

fore hold there is nothing else which can be enjoy'd without it. The health of the *soul* makes abundant amends for the want of *bodily* health ; and the soul being in health, may have a sweet enjoyment of itself ; and which is much more, of the love of God, when through the indisposition of the body, it is cut off from the delights of the world. The soul it must be confessed, depends very much upon the body ; but it depends much more upon God : if therefore all is well on that side, where its chief dependence lies ; if when sick, he who is the life of my soul visits me with his favour, and revives me with the consolations of his spirit, what should hinder my *rejoicing* in him ? It cannot indeed be expected, when a person is languishing on a bed of sickness, his strength decayed, his spirits low, and his *moisture turned into the drought of summer*, that he should then have such lively and sensible emotions, even of *spiritual joy*, so bright and clear a sky, as when his body conspires with his soul in praising God ; much less can they be expected, if he be *chastened with strong pains* ; if his flesh be not only a burden, but a torment to him : but if in such a state as this, the christian can have a *calm*, tho' not a *passionate* joy ; if he can but so far trust and delight in God, as to have his soul supported hereby under all
the

the pressures of the outward man, this must be own'd to be a considerable advantage, a blessing which cannot be sufficiently priz'd. Now such a *joy* as this is what a good man may and ought to be possessed of under the ruins of a falling body ; *when* ^a *his flesh and his heart fail him*, his hope in God should not fail ; and while his *hope* does not fail him, his *joy* cannot ; *God is the strength of my heart*, and will be *my portion for ever* ! This *fleshly tabernacle* totters, and will shortly drop into the dust ; but shall I therefore be disconsolate, when I know my self to be provided of an ^o *house from heaven* ? My soul has its noblest joys apart from the body, joys peculiar to itself, and in which the body has no manner of share : of this nature are all my *rational* and *moral* pleasures, and much more those which are *divine* and *heavenly* ; and on these divine pleasures my soul may feast, even then when my body is incapable of any pleasures at all, and my soul is dislodging from the body, and stepping into another world, where its own proper pleasures will receive their full maturity and perfection.

2. Do I experience the *world* to be a *scene of trouble* ? as this is no more than my blessed Saviour has warn'd me of, when he said to
his

^a Psal. lxxiii. 26.

^o 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

his disciples ^p *in the world ye shall have tribulation*; so he has made good his promise, *not to leave his followers comfortless: in him I have peace*, when in the world I meet with little else but *trouble*. The prophet, having put the case of an utter failure of comfort from the world, ^q *altho' the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat, the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls*; adds, *yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*. He had a secret fund and reserve of satisfaction, which had no communication with the world, so as to ebb and flow with that unquiet sea. This the prophet speaks in the name of all sincere persons who lived under that dispensation; which yet was not so well adapted on many accounts to administer joy in the Lord as the *gospel* is. Accordingly we may take for the true *christian's motto* in affliction and want those words of the apostle Paul: *'Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; having nothing, yet possessing all things*. It is enough, that *'the Lord being my shepherd, I shall not want* what is necessary and most convenient for me, and that my condition is quite the reverse of the wicked man's; for
whereas

^p John xvi. 33.
2 Cor. vi. 10.

xiv. 18.
[Psa. xxiii. 1.

^q Hab. iii. 17, 18.

whereas ^t *in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits*, I shall have a sufficiency; i. e. I shall have that which will make my portion of worldly good sufficient, be it never so small. ^u *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore I will hope*; and hoping, will likewise *rejoice in him*. Having him for my God and portion, I may justly say I have *enough*: this will make up all my losses, and give me satisfaction under all my disappointments. I may lose the world, but I cannot lose my God; I may be disappointed, as to the world; but as long as I place my hope in God, I shall never be ashamed. Here my hopes are firmly bottom'd, and the object vastly exceeds in value my biggest expectations. Well may the good man say to his soul, *Soul, take thine ease*, because tho' he may be so far from having worldly goods *laid up for many years*, as to have only the *bread of the present day*; yet while he can pray to God to ^w *give him day by day his daily bread*, and hath his *all-sufficiency* in which to trust, he cannot be otherwise than happy, which is certainly a very good reason why he should be satisfied.

II. I AM next to prove, that thus to *rejoice in the Lord*, is both the *privilege* and the *duty of the righteous* or sincerely religious.

I. To

^t Job xx. 22. ^u Lament. iii. 24. ^w Matt. vi. 11.

I. To *rejoice in the Lord*, is the *privilege* of the sincerely religious: it is a very great *privilege* to be *able* to do it, and this privilege is *peculiar* to the *righteous*.

I. IT is a very great *privilege* and *happiness* to be *able* to *rejoice in the Lord*. The *object* of this joy is the most *excellent* in the whole compass of being; the *joy itself* resides in the *highest* region of the soul; and the *effects of it* are of all most *extensive, beneficial, and lasting*; which are so many considerations to recommend this joy above all others. The *object* of this joy is the most *excellent* in the whole compass of being; for *who*, or *what* is there in heaven or earth to be compared to the Lord? *Great* and *little* are but *comparative* terms, when applied to *created* good or excellence; that is great which is much greater than other things wherewith it is compar'd; as on the contrary, that is accounted little, which will not bear a comparison with other beings: and when we offer to make a comparison betwixt God and other beings, as there is nothing at all which can be esteem'd or appear great, so all things are equally little, one finite good having the same proportion to an infinite good, that any other has; because the proportion in every case, is less than can be assign'd or express'd: the whole *universe* in this view being *less than nothing* and *vanity*. This

incomprehensibly great and glorious Being, is the *object* of the christian's joy ; and must not that joy which terminates on such an object be preferable to any other ? must not the joy vary with the object ; be mean and low, or high and excellent as that is ? and consequently where the object is of infinite worth, must not the joy have a value which is proportionable ? especially when the *seat* of this joy is the *noblest* in its kind, as well as the *object* of it ? this joy dwells in the highest and purest region of the soul. The soul is superior to the whole world, as much superior is the soul to itself, when it is considered as rejoicing in the Lord, and in the good things of the world. Its sublimest faculties raised and refined by the *grace* of God, and acting in the most perfect manner are required to apprehend and enjoy this most transcendent object. The soul *contracts* its thoughts and desires in conversing with other objects ; here it *swells* and *dilates* them. In most of its other joys, it *stoops* beneath itself ; here it *rises* above its natural level ; the spirit of God opens the eye of the understanding, and sheds a supernatural light upon it, awakens its latent powers, and endows it with a new activity. The abode of this sacred joy is not like this inferior region, where the *atmosphere* is thick and heavy, frequently void of light,
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and engenders storms and tempests, and a variety of diseases ; but like the *superior* part of the heavens, where there is perpetual day, an undisturbed calm, and the *etherial* fluid is unmix'd and unpolluted. Such is the *seat* of this holy joy in comparison of that where sensual appetites and joys are plac'd : surely then it must be a very great *privilege* to possess such a joy as this. Let me add, what will make it unnecessary to mention any thing farther, that the *effects* of this joy are most *extensive*, *beneficial*, and *lasting*. * *The joy of the Lord is our strength* ; it fortifies the soul, and infuses a vigour and courage unknown to others, which makes it victorious over all the power of the enemy : it is exceedingly perfective of our nature, begets high aims, generous sentiments and inclinations, and holy desires. Nothing can improve the mind of man like this sacred joy ; like the contemplation of God, and delighting in him ; bringing it nearer to God, nearer to him both in holiness and happiness. This joy is not confined to *place* or *time*. God being every where, we can every where rejoice in him ; being the disposer of our condition, whatever it be, we can in every condition rejoice in him : whatever else we are doing, still we may rejoice in God, provided we do no-

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* Nehem. viii. 10.

thing displeasing in his sight. This joy is never unseasonable, never out of reach, and which compleats all, never decays : the impression is not fleeting and transient, as in other joys ; but durable like the soul, and everlasting as the foundation on which it rests. All this shows, that to be *able* to rejoice in the Lord, is a very great *privilege*.

2. THIS *privilege* is *peculiar* to the *righteous*, or *sincerely* religious ; they only *can* rejoice in God, and they only have a *right* to do it.

1. THE *righteous alone* are *capable* of *rejoicing in the Lord* ; forasmuch as none besides have the qualifications pre-required to this joy. These are *likeness* and *love* : the holy soul bears a *resemblance* to the holy God, tho' imperfect, and therefore can *delight* in him ; and delight in him the more, the more it resembles him in this respect. A similitude of disposition and manners is the main foundation and cement of human friendships, which are seldom carried to any height ; and yet seldomer prove lasting, where men do not agree in their reigning inclinations. The same is still more necessary in regard of this divine friendship between God and the soul ; the soul not being capable of delighting in God, or God in the soul, till the image of God is traced anew upon it, and they both delight in the same things ; for then, and not before, they will delight in

in each other. Now inasmuch as this can be said of none but those who are *sanctified throughout*, that they are *like God*, the *privilege* of rejoicing in God must be confined to them; and so much the more, as *likeness* is join'd with *love*. Can we rejoice in God while we do not love him? or can we love him, while we continue unlike him? what enjoyment can there be without love? what love without likeness? it is a contradiction that beings should at the same time hate and delight in one another: but this is the state of wicked men; those who hate God, and whom, *as wicked*, and *while they continue* wicked, God hateth. The enmity is mutual, and being mutual, will be an everlasting bar to mutual joy: whereas the love of God is an essential characteristic or mark of every pious soul. Every such soul has not only the highest esteem and veneration for God, on the account of his supreme excellencies, but a prevailing affection and adherence to him: it loves God above all, and by its love is carried with a stronger and more invincible motion towards God, than to other things; it longs to unite with God; him it would enjoy *perfectly*, and him it does enjoy *in part*, by its desires of perfect enjoyment.

2, THE *privilege of rejoicing in the Lord*, (as before explained) must be *peculiar* to the *upright*; because as they alone are *capable* of this joy, being the only persons who have

the requisite qualifications, *viz. likeness and love* ; so they only have a *right* to it. This is evident enough from the former particular, that they alone are *prepared* for it : for certainly the wise God would never give the soul a title to a thing for which it is not prepared ; were it for no other reason than this, that a title in such a case, tho' to the greatest and most valuable blessing in the whole world, could be of no advantage, being much such another gift as light to the blind. But tho' this be a sufficient proof, that wicked men are without a title to this joy, their wanting the capacity or necessary disposition for it ; yet the point is capable of a distinct proof. None may rejoice in God but those who have an *interest* in *Christ* ; if we christians *joy in God*, it is *through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement*. Christ has made atonement for the sins of mankind ; but all have not *received* this atonement, all do not partake in the benefits of it ; and the reason is, that all have not *complied* with the *conditions* on which the offer of a part in it is made to us : and what must follow but that not having *received the atonement*, they are *yet in their sins* ; in a state of guilt and condemnation, and consequently have no right to *joy in God through Christ* ? He
alone

alone can reconcile them to God; he *alone* can procure the forgiveness of their sins; but this he does for none but such as ^z *believe in him*, and unfeignedly *obey his gospel*. Notwithstanding the perfection of his sacrifice, and the prevalency of his intercession, all others are in the same condition, as to any *actual interest* in God, and saving benefits from him, as if there was no sacrifice, and no intercessor. Here the mighty difference between the *happy few*, and the *wretched multitude* takes its rise. But few have that *faith* and *repentance* which is *unto life*; few therefore are pardoned and justified; few have a right to *call* God their God and portion, and to glory and triumph in him; because few really *choose* him as such. The greatest number it is to be fear'd even among nominal christians, are really *without Christ*, and therefore in this sense *without God*; they *cannot truly rejoice in God*, and they have *no right* to rejoice in him.

THUS have I proved, that to *rejoice in the Lord* is the *privilege* of the *sincerely religious*. To be able to rejoice in God after this manner, is a *very great privilege*, and it is a privilege *peculiar* to the righteous: they alone *can* thus rejoice, all besides being without the necessary qualifications for it; and they alone have a *right* to do it, all others being in a state of guilt and condemnation.

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2. To

^z John viii. 24. Heb. v. 9.

2. To *rejoice in the Lord* is the *duty* of those whose distinguishing *privilege* it is, that they *can* do it ; as I shall prove in the next discourse, wherein I shall conclude this subject.



S E R-



S E R M O N XI.

Rejoicing in the Lord the Duty
of the Righteous.

P S A L. xcvii. 12.

Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous.—

FROM these words I undertook to treat the following doctrinal Observation. *That to rejoice in the Lord is both the privilege and the duty of the sincerely religious.* In pursuance of this design, I have

I. SHOWN you what is *meant* by our *rejoicing in the Lord*. And I have

II. SHOWN you that it is the *privilege* of the *sincerely religious* ; and I am now to prove it their *duty*. Nor let any one here object, that *duty* only regards those things which are in our *power* ; but that to *rejoice in God*, is not many times in the power of the
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most sincere and devout souls. My answer to this objection is, that what I here recommend is more in the power of good persons (always supposing the concurrent operations of God's *grace*) than they commonly imagine it to be. If this *joy* itself be not *immediately* in their power, yet it is in their power to do those things by which it is usually procured; and whatever is in their *power* to do for this purpose, it is their undoubted *duty* to do. Let me name some of those things which christians should practise, in order to their being in an *actual* disposition or preparedness of mind to *re-joyce in the Lord*.

I. IT is their *duty* to ^a *make their calling and election sure*, and by an *impartial enquiry* into the state of their souls, to decide the great question upon which their peace so much depends, *viz. Whose they are, and whom they serve?* for if they are the children of God, and serve him in sincerity, nothing else is necessary to their *rejoicing in God*, but their *knowing* it; since, if I know that God is my father, and that I serve him as a son serveth his father, from a filial affection to him as the *principle* of my obedience, and in hope of his favour and acceptance as the utmost *reward* of it; 'tis impossible but I should esteem this a reasonable ground of
joy

joy in God, and as such receive a great deal of satisfaction from it. It is therefore my duty to endeavour to know this; not to be at an uncertainty in an affair of such infinite importance, when I may, with due care and pains, arrive at satisfaction in it. ^b *No man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him.* This implies, that the spirit of a man may know its own things, if it apply itself diligently to know them. And what are those *things* of a man which the spirit that is in him may come to understand? what are they else but those things which do most nearly concern him, the *things of his peace*, the things which *accompany salvation*? And how shall his spirit know these things, but by descending into itself, and communing with itself; examining what is the *chief* object of its love and hatred; which way it most strongly inclines; what it proposes to itself as its *supreme* good; and what, in case of a dispute or competition, he would abide by, so as to part with all other things to secure that? Can I say that God is my *center* and my *end*? the end of all my actions, and the center of my repose? if so, I have no just reason to doubt of my sincerity; I have, on the contrary, reason to *rejoice in my self* as *sincerely*, though not *perfectly* good, and
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^b 1 Cor. ii. 11.

to rejoice in God as approving and accepting me. This is the first particular ; it is the duty of christians to *make their calling and election sure*, i. e. to endeavour to *know* their right to rejoice in God, in order to their being able *actually* to do it.

2. IT is their *duty* to *remove* out of the way whatever things they have found, or their reason tells them are *hindrances* to this holy joy ; particularly these *two*, a multitude of *worldly cares*, and a too free indulgence to *worldly joys and pleasures*.

1. THAT they may be more capable of *rejoicing in the Lord*, they should guard against *worldly cares* ; for these, when they run high, and grow numerous, prey upon the very life and strength of the soul ; its force is spent upon them, and it has no spirit left for the exercises of devotion : and when duties are *spiritless*, it is no wonder they are *joyless* too. The soul should be as much collected in itself as possible ; study to have its thoughts clear and spiritual, and its affections vigorous ; and for this purpose should set a watch at the door of the heart, that the cares of the world do not intrude and fill it. Ah ! how can that christian have a proper *vacancy* of soul for the entertainments of religion, whose attention and regard is so much taken up by earthly objects ? how can he be disposed to enjoy this calm

calm delight in God, to whom the world, or something or other in it, through the ascendant he has given it over him, and the anxiety he suffers about it, is a continual vexation of spirit? Good men are often too faulty in this matter; they care for the things of the world more than they need to do; they have *too many* cares, or their cares sink *too deep* into their minds and hearts. Let not such wonder they receive no more satisfaction from meditating on the *objects of religion*, which, in themselves, are adapted to give the most exquisite delight; they must discharge the train of cumbrous cares, which now engross their minds, before the *joy of the Lord* will enter and possess them.

2. THEY must, on the other hand, beware of a too free indulgence to *worldly* and *sensual joys*, even those which are in themselves innocent: for this is not the only thing to be considered by the christian, I mean the bare *lawfulness* of any entertainment or satisfaction abstractly taken; but do I give my self up to it? if not *wholly*, which cannot well be supposed of the true christian, yet to a much greater degree than I should? by this means it gets the mastery of my soul, takes up that room which might be much better fill'd; sensualizes and depraves my taste, and thereby indisposes me for the fruition of those purer
joys

joys which religion bestows upon all who seek after them. Whatever be the cause of it, 'tis certain in fact, that the most harmless amusements of life, the least dangerous *enjoyments* of the world, the most innocent delights of sense, if we do not exercise a great deal of caution, will leave a taint behind them, and give such a wrong turn to the mind, as it cannot presently and easily rectify. Sensuality, indeed, can never be the predominant character of a true christian; but we must all be convinced that there may be too great remains of this temper where it does not prevail; and the more there is of this temper, the less there must be of that holy and heavenly disposition, which qualifies for the *enjoyment* of religious pleasures. It is very true, that other *joys* of a lawful kind, when *lawfully* used, *i. e.* with moderation, are subservient to religion, and promote our *joy* in God; but it is much otherwise when we make *pleasure* of any kind not so much a *diversion* as our *business*; when our passions are warmly engaged by it, and we are no longer easy than while our circumstances put it in our power to command the returns of pleasure. *Religious joy* has a happy influence on our common *joys* (as I shew'd before) to guide and moderate them: this, at least, is the tendency of *religious joy*; and when it has not this effect, but through our own negligence, or
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the more than ordinary temptations to sensual pleasure, the heart lets itself loose to these low delights, these fleshly and worldly delights have a very bad influence upon our pleasures of a religious kind ; so that the stream abates in this channel in the same proportion as it swells in the other, for it cannot at the same time rise to a very great height in both.

3. IT is the *duty* of christians to *call upon their souls to rejoice in the Lord*. They are not to allow themselves in a heartless melancholly frame ; they must not give way to it, as if it were a temper of mind acceptable to God, and creditable to religion ; but must endeavour to chide themselves out of it, expostulating with their own souls as the *Psalmist* does with his : *Why restless, why cast down, O my soul ? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God*. It can hardly be conceived of what mighty advantage it would be to christians, if under the aids of *divine grace*, they believed themselves to have some considerable power over their affections, particularly in this instance of *holy joy* ; and did accordingly set themselves to use and exercise this power, with a resolution not to be impos'd upon by the apparitions of a dark and benighted imagination ;
nor

nor to have their faculties benumb'd by an unaccountable mopishness and dejection of mind. A great deal more might be done by christians in this case, towards recovering their *joy in God*, would they but persuade themselves that they could do a great deal more, and make trial of their strength; but when they take it for granted, that it is in vain for them to strive, and to argue the case with their own hearts, that do what they will, and use all the means they can think of, they shall not be able to make any advances in the delightful part of religion; like a ship which has no wind to fill its sails, or has the wind against it: and when, in pursuance of this notion, they take a sorry kind of pleasure in indulging their melancholly thoughts; as it cannot be wonder'd at if, though unfeignedly religious, they are strangers to the pleasures of religion, so they have none to blame for it but themselves: for if they will be their own enemies, and instead of opposing their melancholly, will side with it, who can help it? God, indeed can, by an extraordinary and immediate illumination of his Spirit (without any concurrence of theirs, and even while they do all they can to shut out comfort from their own souls) create a bright and peaceful day within them, scattering all the clouds which fancy had rais'd: but though this be a thing *possible*, it is not a thing
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thing to be *expected* by any reasonable person; God will not do *all*, while we refuse to do *any thing*. 'Tis true we can do but little; but then the *less* we can do, the *more* inexcusable is our neglecting to do it; especially when we have so much reason to hope that this little, thro' the aids of the divine spirit, shall not be in vain. And this puts me in mind of the last thing which christians are to practise, in order to obtain this *religious joy*.

4. THEY must make this a *frequent petition* in their addresses to the *throne of grace*, that God would *uphold them with his free spirit*, and enable them to rejoice in him: they should intreat him who is the *father of lights*, to dart some beams of heavenly light into their souls, that they may not sit in *darkness*, and in the *shadow of death*; but walk and rejoice in the light of life. They should beg of God, who is the fountain of blessedness, and the *God of all comfort*, to speak peace to their troubled thoughts, to calm their tumultuous passions, and put them into a capacity of performing all the actions and duties of the divine life with pleasure.

“ Thou hast made it my duty, O Lord, to
 “ rejoice in thee; fain would I rejoice at all
 “ times after this manner, and *triumph in*
 “ *the works of thine hands*. I cannot think
 “ thou wouldest oblige me to any thing

* Psal. li. 12.

" which is impracticable : I conclude, on
 " the contrary, that because it is my duty,
 " therefore it is possible, or shall be made
 " so, upon my humble and earnest suppli-
 " cations to thee ; do thou continually di-
 " rect me to that course which will procure
 " me this inward joy, and let thy grace ex-
 " cite and strengthen me steadily to pursue
 " it : and at the same time that thou in-
 " structest me in the methods of obtaining
 " spiritual joy, grant thou that I may find
 " I do not labour in vain. Let such de-
 " lights spring up in my soul, as may effec-
 " tually convince me of the wisdom of a
 " religious life, and make me scorn every
 " temptation to sacrifice these divine de-
 " lights upon any consideration whatso-
 " ever." These are some of those methods
 which christians may and should practise, in
 order to their being in an actual disposition
 of mind to *rejoice in the Lord*. And that it
 is their duty to *rejoice in the Lord*, by doing
 those things which have a visible tendency to
 procure this joy, will appear from these con-
 siderations.

I. BECAUSE it is very much for the *cre-
 dit of religion*, that the professors of it
 should rejoice in the Lord ; ^d *to shew that
 the Lord is upright, faithful to his pro-
 mises, and good to such as are good ; and
 that*

^d Psal. xcii. 15.

that there is *no unrighteousness in him*. What will they who bear religion no good-will be ready to say of it, when they see that those very persons who make conscience of observing its rules, have to all appearance no enjoyment of themselves, but seem to be some of the most miserable and forlorn of men? and that they have no other pleasures to recompence them for their self-denials as to the pleasures of sense? Will they not be apt to say, surely the yoke of Christ is not what he has represented it, *“an easy yoke, and his burden a light burden”*; the service of God must be a wearisome thing? And not only the professed enemies of religion will be tempted to talk after this manner; but others too, who would have been better disposed to embrace a life of virtue and piety, if it had not been made to appear so frightful to them by the notions and behaviour of some well-meaning but mistaken christians, will be prejudiced against religion. There is no doubt, that christians cannot be too strict and exact in the practice of every thing which is really a part of their religion. Let them be examples of the utmost circumspection and vigilance, in avoiding every thing that is evil; let them not give way to the least sinful compliance; let them shew the utmost purity, diligence and zeal.

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§ Matt. xi. 30.

All this is right; but they may do this and be joyful too: nay, they who act after this manner, have of all men the justest title and pretension to rejoicing; for who should rejoice if they do not, and must not, who live becoming their reasonable nature, and their christian profession; whose principal care it is to keep a *good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly*, and as the gospel requires? Joy and satisfaction are both the *natural* and the *promised* reward of such a course of life. Who should rejoice, if they are forbidden it, who have God for their God and portion, the Lord Jesus Christ for their Saviour and advocate, the Holy Spirit for their sanctifier, and guide, and comforter, and heaven for their everlasting home? How can such persons reflect on all this, and not rejoice in the happiness of their condition? Certainly they would be exceedingly to blame, if they did not rejoice. And if there be this *inward* joy, it will express itself in the *outward conversation*; an easy mind, a joyful contented heart cannot be concealed; all a man's words and actions will be tinged with it, *like the ointment of the right hand* (a sweet perfume chafed with the heat of the hand) *it will bewray itself*, and diffuse its fragrantcy all around; and it is but fit it should; christians should not, if they were able,

able, throw a veil of pensiveness and sorrow over the tranquillity and joy of their hearts. This would not be *humility*, but *affectation*; this would not *adorn* religion, but *disgrace* it; and consequently would not be *pleasing* to God, but rather *displease* him.

2. THE Spirit is communicated for this end, that we might *rejoice in the Lord*, and is therefore called the ^f *comforter*; and as *this*, so his other titles, of a ^g *free spirit*, the ^h *spirit of adoption*, the ⁱ *spirit of glory*, do all signify his being imparted with this design, that we should *rejoice and glory* in that blessed state into which we are translated by the grace of God. ^k *The fruit of the spirit is love, and joy, and peace.* These are the affections of which happiness is made up, and these are the affections which the gospel of our Saviour calls us to exercise, and his spirit is given to raise and actuate. Christians are bound *to love God and one another*; and where this divine affection is triumphant, joy and peace are always found in its train. Let not therefore any of the followers of Christ entertain such a mistaken thought, as if a sorrowful dejected spirit were the true, the genuine spirit of christianity. *Sorrow for sin* there ought to be; but this sorrow, when it is *after a godly sort*,
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being

^f John xiv, 16, &c. ^g Psal. li. 12. ^h Rom. viii.
 15. ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 14. ^k Galat. v. 22.

being an *assurance* of *forgiveness*, is not inconsistent with joy, but productive of it: there being no satisfaction like that which the soul has, not only in reflecting upon this evidence of its being in a state of pardon; but likewise in finding itself in a right disposition towards sin and holiness, full of hatred to the one, and love to the other.

3. THIS joy tends very much to the *advancement* of the *divine life in the soul*. In this sense it may be said, that the *joy of the Lord is the strength* of the righteous. 'Tis of admirable use to confirm them in the ways of piety, to fortify their holy resolutions, and to support them in a time of trouble. The christian whose religion yields him little or no peace and pleasure, is not so likely to be zealously affected in it, or to go on with any speed towards perfection. And by the way, this is a consideration of very great weight, and not to be overlook'd and disregarded by any who are desirous of soul-prosperity. Would you *abound in the work of the Lord*, and in the fruits of holiness? have all the powers and faculties of your souls invigorated? would you improve in every divine virtue, and perform every duty in the most acceptable manner? and what good christian would not? then labour to keep up a spirit of holy joy and chearfulness. Consider that it is your duty to do this,

this, as much as it is your duty to be still advancing in religion ; since the latter of these cannot be well done without the former. Is not the christian life represented as ¹ a race, and as a pilgrimage ? are we not travelling towards Zion ? and what speed can we make with a continual load of sadness and dejection upon our spirits ? how can we *run the race that is set before us* ? how be otherwise than *weary and faint in our minds* ? wherefore ^m *let us lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.* Don't lay stumbling-blocks in your own way ; don't put burdens grievous to be born upon your own shoulders, and afflict yourselves without necessity and beyond measure ; but imitate *David*, who, it is said, ⁿ *encouraged himself in the Lord his God.* The same should every true christian do in a way of well-doing. Under all his infirmities let him, if conscious to his sincerity, *rejoice in God*, who requires nothing more of us as the condition of his favour, than that we be sincere, will graciously assist our weaknesses, and reward our persevering, tho' imperfect obedience, with an everlasting crown. Let us thus *rejoice in God thro' Jesus Christ*, tho' not without a

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humble

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 24. 1 Pet. ii. 11. ^m Hebr. xii. 12, 13.
ⁿ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

humble sense of our great unworthiness and manifold defects, and then we shall find that we are much more lively and active in religion; and being freed from that burden under which we were before ready to sink, shall be able ° *to run in the way of God's commandments; to run, and not be weary; to walk, and not faint.*

I WILL now conclude this subject with a suitable *application* of the whole: first, by way of *inference*; and then by a distinct *address* to two sorts of men, good men and bad, or the *evangelically righteous, and sinners.*

THE *inference* I draw from what has been offered to your consideration, is this, That *religion* is *no enemy* to the *happiness* of the *present* life. It was not so under the *legal* dispensation, when this *Psal*m was written; since the *Psalmist* would never have been guilty of exciting men to the exercise of an affection, which that dispensation would not admit; and much less is the *christian* religion, which in many respects so much excels the *Jewish*, to be so esteemed. Religion under the gospel appears in its brightest and fairest light; and therefore, if naturally fitted to produce joy, must needs do it now, wherever it prevails in the soul, and has no false notions or prejudices to counter-

counter-act it. No one can think or speak evil of the religion of Christ, who rightly understands it ; for what is the main design of the gospel, but to *restore* us to God and to *ourselves*, to our *innocence* and *happiness*? This might easily be shewn from the several views in which christianity is capable of being considered, I would only, at present, take notice of its tendency to promote our well-being, both in this life and the next, by the provision it has made for the due government and regular exercise of our affections. These affections of our nature may be considered with regard to *action* and *enjoyment*. The two chief springs of *action* are *hope* and *fear*; the principal ingredients in the fruition of *happiness*, are *love* and *joy*. As to the first pair of these affections, which are the most universal springs of action, *viz.* *hope* and *fear*, no religion can possibly be better adapted to awaken and regulate these than the christian : for what will awaken our *hope*, if the prospect of such a state of blessedness as the gospel sets before us (in which there is nothing deficient, and of which there will be no end) will not do it? What can reasonably be supposed to awaken our *fears*, if the *wrath* of God, revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness,

ness, be not sufficient to this end? What method can be proposed for the regulation of our other *hopes* and *fears*, so likely to succeed as this, of making them all subservient to those *hopes* and *fears* which terminate on things invisible and eternal? Now the end of exciting our *fear* as well as our *hope*, being this, that we might hereby be engag'd to act right in order to our avoiding the punishment of a vicious life, and receiving the reward of a virtuous one; the gospel, even in setting our *fears* to work after this salutary manner, appears to be so far from an enemy, as to discharge the part of a very great friend to us. The same may be remark'd concerning our *love* and *joy*, the passions or affections on which our fruition of happiness more immediately depends. Were our souls under the powerful influence of that love which the gospel aims to kindle in our breasts, even the love of God and of Jesus; and did we experience more of that secret joy, to which we are so frequently and so earnestly invited by God himself; we should be more truly and eminently happy than we now are: and being possess'd of true happiness, we should not be so much in danger of pursuing after that which is false and fugitive. We may add, the higher degrees we enjoy of this divine happiness, the more steady and insuperable

superable will the adherence of our souls be to their supreme good ; and the principal objects of our *love* and *joy* being wisely chosen and deeply fixed, will so direct and over-rule our love of inferior things, and delight in them, as to preserve them within the bounds of reason, beyond which they only give occasion to greater disquietude and vexation. And what just ground can persons then have to entertain such an ill opinion of religion, of the christian religion ? 'Tis true, christianity obliges us ^a *to mortify our members which are upon the earth* ; but when we come to enquire what these members are which we are to treat so severely, we shall find they are only certain *excrescences* of our nature, irregular lusts and passions, as incompatible with our peace and happiness as they are with our duty ? ^a *Mortify your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.* This shows, that though these corrupt inclinations are stil'd *our members*, it is only as we are corrupted by sin ; they do not belong to *primitive nature*, to which the *new nature* is no way contrary, but to its *depravation*. 'Tis farther acknowledg'd, that the gospel contains the most perfect scheme of

^a Colof. iii. 5.

of the whole duty of man ; enjoining such degrees of purity, such heights of divine love, that it is no easy thing to be a christian indeed. But what does this prove ? not what it is imagin'd to prove by some persons, that the religion of Jesus Christ is not adapted to the felicity of this life ; but the direct contrary : for christianity lays no other burden upon us but such things as are in their own nature necessary ; no other burden than our own reason, in its state of rectitude and illumination, would lay upon us ; and what, in truth, would be no burden at all, if the depravation of our faculties did not make it so. The aim of christianity, in the restraints it lays us under, is only to remove what would incapacitate us for the enjoyment of true pleasure ; and when it obliges us to be holy in all manner of conversation, 'tis upon this account, that *holiness* is the foundation of *happiness*, *virtue* of *self-enjoyment* ; that having discharged our duty towards God, we might be able to rejoice in him, which we could not else do. *Godliness* has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come : not indeed of the *pride* and *incumbrance* of life, of worldly *affluence*, and *greatness*, and *pleasure* ; but of that *happiness* which is most suitable to a *reasonable* nature, and

and to the *dignity* of our christian profession. The glory of God in the happiness of man, is the great end which the gospel proposes, and to which all its restraints and obligations, how severe soever they may look, are designed as necessary and subservient means. It must be confess'd, that the happiness of the *next* life is the design *principally* intended; as it *ought* to be, since it is of as much more importance than the happiness of the present, as the duration of *eternity* exceeds that of *time*: but then the happiness of this life is consulted and promoted as far as is consistent with a due regard to that compleat felicity of which we are in expectation. And even this, though it be not the greatest happiness of which we are capable, and for which we are designed, is yet considerable enough to make it worthy any man's choice to be a christian.

LET me now, as I propos'd, address myself to those two sorts of persons into which all our congregations are divided, *viz.* the *sincerely religious*, and those *void* of the *truth* of religion; those who are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, and those who are *not*.

I. LET *true* christians permit me to be their remembrancer, as to their *privilege* and *duty* in the instance before us. What a singular *privilege* is this which they possess,

less, that they can *rejoice in the Lord*; *rejoice in him at all times*? that whatever their condition and circumstances be in other respects, they have still abundant reason to *rejoice in God*? and how ready should they be to acknowledge the goodness of God in making this their *duty*, which is so invaluable a *privilege*? For certain, this is an additional motive to the *love of God*, which is the sum of all religion: '*God has pleasure in the prosperity of his servants*, and maketh them *partakers of his holiness*, that they may partake of his blessedness. "*O love the Lord therefore, all his saints, and delight in him.* Let praise and thanksgiving be a great part of the employment of your lives, as it will be your work wholly and eternally when you come to heaven. Watch against every thing which would indispose you for the enjoyments of the divine life; and remember, that by intermitting the *operations* and *exercises* of the heavenly life, you deprive yourselves of its *pleasures*. If at any time, by carnal indulgencies, or any other means, you are grown *indevout*, and have not that *rejoicing in yourselves*, or in *God*, which you have sometimes had, call to mind ^w *whence you are fallen*, and what you have lost, and
set

^t Psal. xxxv. 27. ^c Heb. xii. 10. ^u Psal. xxxi.
23. xxxvii. 4. ^w Rev. ii. 4, 5.

set yourselves to do your *first works*, and to regain your *first love*, that you may recover your former joy and confidence in God. And thus, from time to time, you should recollect yourselves, examine the state of your souls, repair any decays, and correct any slips and errors which may have been occasioned by your want of care and watchfulness, and stir up yourselves to *take hold of God and his strength*. You should always suspect that things are not as they should be, when you can take as much pleasure as usual in *other things*, or more, but not in *religion*. This too plainly betrays such a moral indisposition of soul, as you should do your utmost to remove, both as your *fault*, and as your *unhappiness*.

2. As for those who *never* yet had any *saving acquaintance* with God, tho' the exhortation in the text does not *immediately* concern them, forasmuch as they can have no just ground for *rejoicing in God* who are in a state of enmity against him; yet *indirectly* the words regard them also. It does not belong to them to *rejoice in the Lord* in the *same manner* that the *righteous* do, whose peculiar *privilege* this is, to regard God as their reconciled God and Father: but then 'tis the *privilege* of others besides the *righteous*, and a very great *privilege*, that they may get into that state

state in which they shall have an actual title to this joy ; and as it is *their privilege* that they can attain to such a state, so it is equally their *duty* to endeavour after it.

1. IT is your *privilege*, that altho' you are not yet in that most blessed state to which this joy in God belongs, yet you are told how you *may attain it*. You may, if you humbly *implore* the grace of God, and faithfully *improve* the grace that is given, be converted and saved. You may have your nature, which you have corrupted by your sinful practices, and with that your state changed ; ** be renewed in the spirit of your minds*, and be brought near to God, from whom you are now most deplorably estranged. And when this great and happy change is effected, you will soon find the comfortable fruits of it ; you will acknowledge it to be *† good for you to draw nigh to God*, and that, by *‡ acquainting yourselves with him*, you have obtained that *peace*, of which, till now, you had scarce so much as a notion. And is not this to be owned a very great happiness, and with great thankfulness to God for it, that you are not excluded from this joy of the Lord ? that by only taking some previous steps, you may infallibly secure it ?

To

** Ephes. iv. 23. † Psal. lxxiii. 28. ‡ Job xxii. 21.*

To you therefore I call, who have hitherto walked in the *way of your own hearts*, and have had no other pleasures but those which spring from the gratification of your sensual and earthly desires ; or, at best, have been strangers to the pleasures attending a state of reconciliation with God ; to you I call to endeavour after that diviner joy which religion holds forth to its votaries. For,

2. 'Tis your *duty to labour* after this *change* in your state ; as it is your *privilege*, that if you *sincerely* and *perseveringly* endeavour it, you shall not fall short of what you pursue. You have your duty, or something which you are to perform with relation to this *spiritual joy*, as well as sincere christians ; and your duty lies plainly before you, namely, to put yourselves into a *capacity of rejoicing in the Lord* ; which you will never be while you are under the power of any sin, and strangers to the *power of godliness*. There are many very urgent motives which should induce sinners to enter upon a religious course of life ; and this not the least of them, that such a course of life is attended with much better pleasures than those which they sacrifice for it. And hereupon I would desire you to consider, that every motive to an holy life increases your obligations to it. Is it certain, that^a *in keeping the commandments*

^a Psal. xix. 11.

of God *there is great reward*, particularly on this account, that it makes us *capable* of delighting in him, and gives us a *right* to do it? from hence I conclude, that I am the more strongly obliged to keep these commandments, and shall be more inexcusably guilty before God if I do not.

To *prepare* the way for such a change of life as I am now exhorting you to accomplish, *begin with laying aside* all your *prejudices* against religion, as if it were intended only for a state of uneasy penance, not of delight and enjoyment. Consider what has been offer'd before, and such things as your own thoughts will farther suggest if you impartially consult them, and you will be convinc'd that you wrong religion when you paint it with such a deform'd and dismal visage. Regard religion as the way, the only way, to solid peace and true happiness; and then set yourselves to follow the rules and directions which it sets before you. By ^b *repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus*, join'd with an assiduous imitation of his holy life, and obedience to his divine precepts, make sure of the pardon of your sins, and the sanctifying Spirit; that so your consciences being cleans'd and compos'd, and all the faculties of your souls put into their right order by the grace of God, you may enjoy the ^c *peace of God*,
which

^b Acts xx. 21.^c Phil. iv. 7.

which passeth all understanding ; and leading a^d sober, righteous and godly life, may experience that joy in the Lord, that secret pleasure and satisfaction, which will help you to form a better conception of the blessedness of the heavenly world, and be a very proper and natural introduction to the enjoyment of it for eternity.

^d Tit. ii. 12.





S E R M O N XII.

Of walking worthy of God.

I T H E S S. ii. 12.

*That ye would walk worthy of God,
who has called you unto his king-
dom and glory.*

THE great design of the gospel is to make men *holy* now, in order to their being *happy* for ever. To this end are levelled all the commands, all the exhortations, all the doctrines and promises of the gospel; and a most excellent design this is! the most excellent that can enter into the thoughts of a reasonable creature, and as well executed: at least, this may be said, that if the effect does not answer, it is not from any thing wanting on the side of our religion; which is as admirably adapted to reform the tempers and lives of men, as
any

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any institution coming from God can be
imagined to be.

St. Paul being the apostle of the *Gentiles*,
was exceeding solicitous for the success of
the gospel among them; not grudging
any pains and care, nor declining any
suffering, that he might assist them in
obtaining that great salvation which the
grace of God has brought to mankind by
the preaching of the gospel. So he tells the
Thessalonians, ^a *that being affectionately de-*
sirous of them, he was willing to have im-
parted to them, not the gospel of God only,
but also his own soul, because they were dear
unto him: and his life was agreeable to his
letters, ^b *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how*
holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved
ourselves among you that believe. And upon
this double title, of affection to them, and
a correspondent conversation, he may rea-
sonable expect to be well received by them,
when he exhorted, and comforted, and charged
every one of them, as a father doth his child-
ren, that they would walk worthy of God, who
had called them unto his kingdom and glory.
By the metaphor of *walking*, is denoted the
habitual temper of a man's mind, and course
of his life; and when it is said to be *worthy*
of God, the meaning is, that it should be
such, in all respects, as the gospel requires.
And what sort of life is it which the gospel
obliges

X 3

^a 1 Thess. ii. 8.

^b Ver. 10.

obliges us to lead, but one adorn'd with all virtue and goodness? so that the general instruction which the words offer us is this,
That an holy and good life is the only life worthy of God, to which, all professing christianity should be effectually engaged, from the consideration of God's having called them to his kingdom and glory.

IN treating this proposition, I shall do these following things :

I. ATTEMPT a *short delineation* or *description* of the *life* here intended.

II. SHEW how *such* a life, and *no other*, is *worthy of God*.

III. THE *force* of the *motive* added to ingage us to *such* a life, viz. *God's having called us unto his kingdom and glory*.

I. I SHALL attempt a *short delineation* or *description* of the *life* here intended. All christians agree in their *praises* of a good life, as they must also in their *notion* of it, if they consult the scriptures, or their own unprejudiced reason. The *lowest* degree of goodness or holiness is that which is *negative*; consisting in our *ceasing to do evil*; *denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts*; *not being conformed to the present world* in its sinful customs and examples. This is the *first* thing

† Isa. i. 16. Tit. ii. 12. Rom. xii. 2.

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thing observable in a good life, a freedom from moral evil. Sin is not obeyed, but avoided; if the man has done wickedly, he heartily repents of it, and firmly resolves to do so no more. He ^d *puts off, concerning his former conversation, the old man, with his affections and lusts*; lives not in the habitual practice of any sin; ^e *abstains from all appearance of evil*, much more from every thing that is scandalous, directly and plainly repugnant to the rules of virtue and religion. A good life can never consist with the *habit* of any vice. Whoever is *enslav'd*, I don't say to several sins, but to any one sin, whatever notion he may have of himself, or whatever name his party may give him upon the account of his party zeal, or the need they have of him, 'tis certain he is not a good man. The next step to *ceasing to do evil*, is *learning to do well*; *putting on the new man* after we have *put off the old*; being transformed by the renewing of our minds, and performing all the duties of a virtuous and religious life, as well as avoiding the sins directly opposite to it. This is *positive holiness*; and where there is the former in sincerity, there will, by natural and unavoidable consequence, be this too. The hatred of evil will ever be attended with the love of that which is good; a constant,

X 4

uniform

^d Eph. iv. 22.

^e 1 Theff. v. 20.

uniform forbearance, upon principle, of all acts of intemperance, unrighteousness, and ungodliness, will be followed by the contrary virtues of a sober, righteous, and godly life. The man, who out of conscience *crucifies the flesh, with its affections and lusts*, will labour unweariedly to have affections of a different kind, holy and heavenly affections introduced into his soul: the man who would not do an unjust thing upon any account whatsoever, rather choosing to *suffer wrong* than to do it; will not refuse to do any thing for the promoting the good and happiness of his neighbour, which he can reasonably expect from him: he will not be content merely with not injuring him, whatever his temptations be, but be ready to do him good; and not merely out of tenderness for his reputation, abstain from wounding it, but, if he be really thus tender of it himself, will guard it when unjustly attacked by others. He who would not tell a lie, were it never so gainful, will have the same esteem for truth, I mean the positive part of it, as he hath abhorrence for lying; he will no more suppress the truth when it ought to be told, than he will, knowingly, utter a falsehood. The person whom no temptation could prevail on to be guilty of any thing which would be to the *dishonour* of God, will not stop there; but
 think

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think of those things whereby he may *glorify* him : not profaning the name of God will not be judg'd enough ; he will likewise *reverence* this holy name, and neglect none of the duties of divine worship in secret or publick. The same God whom he is fearful of offending, he will be careful to please ; and having all impiety in abomination, he will not be totally defective in true piety. And the reason of all this is plain : *conscience* is an *uniform* principle, regarding alike every instance of duty ; so as to be more properly compared to the *light*, which equally diffuses itself on all hands, where it is not kept out, than to the wind, which drives only one way. Accordingly the apostle *James* has told us, *that whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* Why so ? *because He that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill ; now if thou committest not adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.* In like manner, he who forbids that which is evil, commands that which is good : and there being *one law-giver who is able to save and to destroy, and one general reason and foundation of the law*, whether negative or affirmative, *viz. the nature of things* ; is it not evident, that whoever has that regard to the authority of God, and to the

^f James ii. 10, 11.

the intrinsic evil of those things which he has forbidden, as to preserve the negative precepts of the law inviolable, cannot be capable of living in the wilful omission of those duties which are the subject matter of the affirmative precepts; since he could not be guilty of so doing without slighting the authority of God, which alike supports every part of his law, and despising virtue and holiness, which must always appear amiable and good, in the same proportion as its contrary vice appears odious? In short, the positive part of a good life is inseparably connected with the negative, where this latter is in sincerity. And the two great branches of positive religion or virtue, are the *love of God*, and the *love of our neighbour*, appearing in all the actions of an useful and pious life, which can be expected to flow from principles so noble and divine. Where these principles govern, every virtue will be exemplified, every faculty employ'd in its proper operations, every passion be well govern'd, every action rightly directed; and though imperfections there will be, yet none which are inconsistent with the prevalency of the good character; and there will be an endeavour after perfection; which minds me of the third and highest step of a good life, and which may be look'd upon as a sort of *perfection*, when compar'd

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compar'd with the lowest degrees of it, and that is, when a man with *great vigour and activity of soul*, pursues and practises that which is good; does not *barely practise it*, but *delights* in doing it; aims at things which are *excellent*, things whereby the character of the christian and his religion are most of all *adorned*; whereby one may most *edify another*, and give the world the most convincing proof of the excellency of the gospel institution, and the amiableness of the christian temper: when the *ways of wisdom* or religion are beyond all comparison *peaceful and pleasant*; and all the *temptations* of life; and the several *difficulties* of obedience are *overcome* with the greatest *ease*. Happy they who attain to this degree! this is a state of *liberty* and *perfection*; the habit and disposition of soul in such persons is more intirely changed; there is a greater uniformity, and a greater strength in the principles of holy action: the work of sanctification is more compleat; the soul is got higher in its ascent towards the source of its being and felicity; is more free from all foreign impulses; acts more like itself, according to its pure original nature, and with a more ardent thirst after its true happiness: it now discerns more clearly than ever the beauty of *divine truth*, and is more strongly mov'd by the springs of *divine affection*,

affection, the force of which it feels in all its operations. And, according to the natural progress of holiness, this is the state to which the good man is continually approaching; *he goes from strength to strength*, one good action leads to another; and a *course* of good actions, to a *habit* of well-doing. The oftner a man does good actions, with the greater pleasure he does them; 'till at last, that which in the beginning was self-denial, almost ceases to be so; and what was a great difficulty, becomes none; the greater progress he has made, the more easy he finds it to go on; and after he has begun to grow rich in spirituals, to grow still richer: which puts me in mind of an observation made by a very wise man, that he first got a little estate with a great deal of pains; and having laid that foundation, after that, a great estate with very little. This may be applied here, the *main* difficulties are at the *entrance* of a good life; the motion at first is slower, and with less pleasure, because the strength is less: but let him only persevere, and he will find, that as he advances farther in virtue, his progress will be greater, in the *same time*, than it was at his first setting out. The sum is, that a holy and good life consists in fleeing every sin; and practising every virtue. This is essentially necessary to such a life, the perfection

fection of which lies in a very great freedom from the remains of sin ; being able more easily to overcome all the temptations to it, even those that are most uncommon ; and delightfully abounding in the exercises of all divine virtues.

II. MY business next is to show you how *such* a life, and *no other*, is *worthy of God*. This is an expression of very high dignity, and great significance. When we hear it said, that we must *walk worthy of God*, we presently conceive something extraordinary to be meant : for as all mankind agree in believing that there is a God, so in their apprehensions of him as the *greatest* and most *perfect* of all beings, supremely blessed and glorious. So far all men are right in their notions of this most adorable Being ; but then, too many are very inconsistent in the several parts of their belief : they own that God is possess'd of all perfection, and yet, perhaps, believe, that in all his actings he has no other rule but *mere arbitrary* will and pleasure. He is the most glorious Being ; and, according to them, is *therefore* the most glorious, because he acts after this manner : or they imagine him to be moved only by *blind* and *fond* affection, *i. e.* he is *all sovereignty* or *all goodness* ; hath regard to nothing else but showing his own power, or
con-

contributing to the happiness of his creatures, however they behave. This is not *thinking worthily of God*; which every man had need to do, before he can have a clear conception what it is to *walk or act worthy* of him, and be made sensible, that the *only life worthy of God*, is a life directed and animated by a sincere constant love of all virtue and goodness. 'Tis certain, that if we suppose the truth of that idea of God, which was just now mentioned, as an *arbitrary*, or a *fond and easy* being; it will be impossible to show, that a life of universal righteousness and goodness is properly founded in such a notion of the Deity.

I. WERE God an arbitrary being, so as to prefer one way of acting to another, not because it was *wiser and better*, but as a *greater* manifestation of his *unlimited power and dominion*; how should we be able to prove, that to *walk worthy of God* was to *walk holily*? that is, to love every thing that was good and excellent, and because it was so? In acting thus we should not *imitate* God; since, while he had regard only to what argued greatness and power, we considered what was good, and true, and just, and honourable, and lovely. Indeed, such a wrong notion of the sovereignty of God, must almost unavoidably produce very bad effects. When persons have much the same thoughts

thoughts of the true God, as some *barbarous* people in *Africa* have of an evil being, whom they worship; that he reckons what he pleases an offence, and plagues them when he pleases, though they have done nothing which they are sensible deserves his displeasure; how is it possible, that such thoughts of God (if not mix'd with others of a better nature and tendency) should breed right affections of mind, in respect either of God, of our neighbour, or ourselves? will they not rather drive men from God, than allure them to him? or, supposing they should beget a sort of love to God, and delight in him, from an imagination that he has chosen them for his *special* favourites, on whom he will *lavish* out his bounty; while, for others, he has nothing reserv'd but wrath and vengeance: is not this rather *self-love* than *love to God*? or, when we have made the best of it, not a love of *esteem* and *rational delight*? and what influence will these notions be apt to have upon their temper, as to *themselves*, and their behaviour towards their *fellow men*? Are not pride, and self-conceit, and ill-nature, and uncharitableness, admiration of themselves, and contempt of others, an imperious and tyrannical conduct, the *natural* offspring of such apprehensions of the Deity? On taking the thing in the most favourable light, thus, that men consider a
holy

holy life as the will of God ; and the almighty power and absolute dominion of God as a sufficient foundation of obedience to his will ; and upon this view of the matter are studious to live and act as God has commanded them : yet, if at the same time that they believe that the will of God is *alone* reason enough for their obedience (as indeed it is) they are persuaded that God himself has *no reason* for his will ; and that there is no intrinsic, necessary and unalterable difference between virtue and vice ; it must be a miracle, if obedience, founded upon such principles, be so free, so chearful, so universal, so constant as another which proceeds from a notion of God as *good and righteous himself*, as well as a lover of goodness and righteousness in his reasonable creatures ; of which more in the sequel of this discourse. If we believe that God had no reason but sovereignty for requiring the virtues of a good life, we shall be apt to fancy, under strong temptations, that he may dispense with his laws, and that in favour of those on whom he hath fixed his absolute choice he will do it ; *not beholding iniquity in Jacob*, nor seeing any thing in his *elect* to alienate his heart from them.

2. LIKE to this, in the unhappy influence it has upon mens lives, is a notion of God as mov'd by *fond and blind* affection ;
 nor

nor is this notion, absurd as it is, very uncommon, or embraced only by the vulgar : it has been at all times usual for men who were unwilling to forsake their vices, and for that reason had no desire to examine the truth of their notions, to give into this way of thinking ; reasoning thus with themselves : “ God never *made* men to *damn* them ; his “ *goodness* is *infinite*, and therefore extends to “ all ; his patience, forbearance and mercy “ the most wonderful that can be, and there- “ fore never to be tir’d out.” But though God did not *originally* make any of his reasonable creatures to damn them, may they not by their *impenitency* in sin *oblige* him to do it ? Though the goodness of God be infinite, yet it cannot flow out in pleasure and happiness upon those who are not *proper* objects of it ; as they are, in the nature of the thing, *improper* objects of goodness, who are not qualified to enjoy the effects of it. Though the patience and long-suffering of God be really wonderful, yet not without all limits ; the wisdom of God prescribes bounds to them. It is true, if goodness be a blind affection in God, not flowing from wisdom, and directed by it, which is the account that some men of no small eminence in the learned world have given of it, the consequence is unavoidable ; that God will make men happy in spite of themselves,

and that he cannot cease to love them, how much soever they abuse their liberty, and pervert the design of any of his gifts : As from hence this farther consequence will arise, though not allow'd by them, that men will be led to think slightly of virtue and religion ; nor will it be easy to answer their arguments for sinful indulgences, if there be no moral fitness in things, not even in the divine goodness itself : the reason that *God is good*, and *does good*, according to them, not being, that goodness is *morally better* than its contrary, or more agreeable to the wisdom of his infinite understanding, and the rectitude of his most perfect nature ; but because by a happy, but unavoidable necessity, his inclination lies this way. Religion consisting not only in the *worship* but *imitation* of the Deity, how can the vicious part of mankind be so much to blame in following their inclinations, if God himself chuses one way of acting rather than another, *only* upon the account of its being more agreeable to a natural inclination, without any regard at all to its having a greater antecedent suitableness to his moral perfections, which they suppose it has not ?

THE result is, that a *holy and virtuous* life will then only appear *worthy of God*, and *founded* in the *notions* we have of him, when these *notions* themselves are *worthy* of the Deity :

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Deity: for if they are not (as most undoubtedly they are not, when we conceive of God as acting from *mere arbitrary will and pleasure*, or from *blind and fond affection*) it will not be easy to make out the connection between the universal, constant, and delightful practice of virtue, and the idea of God. But the proof of this will lie as plain and manifest as any thing in the world, if we have those honourable thoughts of God which we ought to have, and which we are taught both by reason and revelation.

WE shall be convinc'd, that a *holy and good* life is *walking worthy of God*; and that there is *no other way* of doing it, whether we consider him in *general*, as the most *excellent and perfect* of all beings, or take a more *distinct* view of his *moral* attributes; or, to the consideration of these, add that of his *other* perfections.

I. A *holy life* is *worthy of God* as the *most excellent and perfect* of all beings. This is one of the first and most simple ideas which offers itself to the mind, when we are meditating concerning God; that he is of a nature transcendently excellent: for if there be any such thing as excellence, he must needs have it who is the fountain and author of all things. Whatever is a *just* object of love and esteem, that we call *excellence*; and

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can we think of nothing in the whole creation which demands this affection? whatever it be, the same thing, in a more perfect manner, and in an incomparably higher degree, is in God. God then is the *most excellent Being*; and herein does a life of sincere religion, strict and uniform virtue, appear to be *worthy of God*, that it is the *most excellent thing* in the whole moral world. Among the creatures of God, those endow'd with reason and liberty are most excellent; and among the accomplishments of such intelligent beings, those of a moral kind, the qualities and dispositions which denominate a person a truly good man, are the noblest. This is the foundation of that saying of the Wiseman, ^g *that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*. And when the Psalmist speaks of the ^h *excellent in whom was all his delight*, he means the same persons, men of integrity, ⁱ *who do good and eschew evil*; ^k *in all things willing, and exercising themselves to keep a good conscience*. And if it be asked, wherein this excellence of true virtue, or goodness, or holiness, call it by what name you will, is seen? I answer, in its being a conformity to the *highest reason*, the most perfect state of the human faculties, and the most natural and very best way of exercising

^g Prov. xii. 26.

^h Psal. xvi. 3.

ⁱ Job i. 1.

^k Acts xxiv. 16. Heb. xiii. 18.

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exercising them, most satisfying to the mind itself, most useful to others, most conducive to private happiness, and most agreeable to the order of the universe. *Virtue is truth, beauty, harmony, freedom, tranquillity, and happiness; the health and strength of the soul; the convenience, the security, and the ornament of the life; that which unites all the actions, as effects of one vital principle, and means of one and the same glorious end; and upon all these accounts claims the name of excellent.* The good man is excellent because he is good; and in the same proportion as he is better than another, he is more excellent, shows himself to be more mindful of the dignity of his nature, and to have a juster sense of his true happiness, and in a word, makes a better use of his reason, and all his reasonable and active powers. This is a short but evident proof of the superior excellence of a holy and virtuous life; as this excellence of virtue proves it to be *worthy of God*, according to this *general* notion of him, as the most *perfect* and *excellent* of all beings.

2. WE shall be sensible that a *holy and virtuous* life is the *only* life *worthy of God*, if we enter into a *distinct* contemplation of his *moral attributes*. The *general foundation* of these attributes is the absolute *rectitude* of the divine nature, or the determination of

the divine will to that which is *best* in all cases and circumstances. God being infinitely wise, cannot but know what is right and fit; and because he has no irregular bias on his will, which is in *scripture* expressed by his ¹ *not being tempted with evil*, cannot but chuse it, and delight in it. This is his *holiness*, or *love of righteousness*, for which he is so often celebrated in the sacred writings. That which answers to this perfect rectitude of nature in God, is a likeness of nature, and a similitude of choice in man. We must prefer that which is best, because it is best, because it is suitable to the nature of things, the nature of other intelligent beings, and the nature which God has given us. The ^m *way of righteousness* must be our *choice*; and the greater degree of moral and spiritual goodness there is in any action, the more intensely must our affection be set upon it. This is *walking worthy of God*, this is being ⁿ *partakers of a divine nature*, because it is loving, and chusing, and acting as God does. But let us take a more distinct view of these moral attributes; they are chiefly three, *righteousness*, *goodness*, and *truth*.

1. THE *righteousness* or *justice* of God is his *invariable regard* to the *rights of all beings*, both his *own* and those of *other intelligent beings*,

¹ James i. 13.

^m Psal. cxix. 30. ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 4.

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beings, which he will never violate himself, nor suffer to be violated by them. This attribute cannot be wanting in him who is the self-existent, and all-perfect being, the creator, governour, and judge of the world; in all which relations he preserves the rights of justice sacred and inviolable. As *creator*, he cannot be supposed to give being to any only to make them miserable. It is impossible this should be his *first* and *immediate* design, because this would not be doing justly; since every being has a right not to be miserable, that has not deserv'd it. As the supreme and righteous *governour* of the world, God can never require of his reasonable creatures what it is not possible for them to perform; the reason is, that what is not possible is not a proper object of duty, or a thing to which the being to whom it is impossible can be obliged; and what God's reasonable creatures cannot be obliged to do, he cannot require of them. He would act inconsistently with his own essential justice if he should; which is too absurd to be conceiv'd. As the *judge* of *all the earth*, he cannot but *do right*, ° *rendering to every man according to his deeds*. His *judgment is according to truth*; for he will ^P *judge every man without respect of persons*, dispensing rewards or punishments agreeably to the different

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charac-

° Rom. ii. 2, 5, 6, 11. ^P 1 Pet. i. 17.

characters and behaviour of *free* beings; not merely their seeming characters, but inward and real. And how shall we *walk worthy* of this attribute of *justice*, but by *strictly* observing the rules of justice *ourselves*, ^a *rendering to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's*? not withholding from God that religious fear, and worship, and reverence, that love and obedience, which by so many claims are his undoubted right; for then we should be guilty of injustice, where it would be most highly criminal: ^r *rendering to all their due; never doing to another what we would not that another should do unto us*, ^f *nor going beyond and defrauding another in the least matter*; and if we are call'd to determine controversies between others, ^t *always judging upright judgment*. All this enters into the notion of a virtuous life, and all and every part of it is necessary to our *walking worthy of God*; since there is *no other* behaviour *suitable* to the justice of God, but what is uniformly just itself; and what is not suitable to it cannot be worthy of it.

2. THE *goodness* of God is that attribute of his nature which is the *cause* or *ground* of his *doing good* to his creatures. 'Tis the *will* of God, *determin'd* by his *wisdom*, to be-
flow

^a Matth. xxii. 21. ^r Rom. xiii. 7. Matth. vii. 12. ^f 1 Theff. iv. 6. ^t Deut i. 17.

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flow happiness upon *all* his creatures, according to their respective natures, who do not render themselves *utterly unworthy* of it, by refusing to comply with the only method in which he can make reasonable beings happy, which is by their first becoming holy. And when this is the case, that a reasonable being *will not* be made holy, he ceases to be an object of goodness, and has none to blame but himself that he is not happy. This *single* case excepted, he who has almighty power, delights in nothing more than employing that power for the advantage and happiness of his creatures; supplying their wants, relieving their weaknesses, at the same time making gracious allowances for all their failings and defects, removing all difficulties out of their way, or leaving none which are insuperable; and, finally, providing a happiness adequate to their noblest capacities, and to their longest duration. Such is the goodness of God! and what is the disposition, the character and conduct in man which is *worthy* of this goodness? surely no other but what fairly *corresponds* to it, and renders man *like* God, in this most amiable perfection. To goodness, and beneficence, and mercy on God's part, the only correspondent dispositions on man's are *repentance*, or godly sorrow for sin, *love* and *gratitude*. A good life implies

plies all these, and all these are implied in a temper and demeanor *worthy* of the infinite goodness of God. Unless we ^u *love God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength*; ^w *are thankful unto him, and bless his name*; and are so affected with the ^x *riches of his goodness*, as to be *led* to an ingenuous *repentance* for all those offences which we have been guilty of against him; it is certain that we make God the most improper returns. Correspondent to this unbounded goodness of God, which, in conferring happiness, stints itself to no other measure but our capacities, is a *sincere* and *constant* endeavour to *prepare* ourselves for the greatest and fullest emanations of the divine goodness; remembering that the goodness of God, infinite as it is, can flow out to us no farther than we are qualified to receive it: and then, if we are disposed to practise as the goodness of God teacheth us to do, we shall take a pleasure to walk after it, *imitating* the best of beings in that which he esteems his greatest glory, that is, in *doing good*; and making the same *general* use of our *small* abilities, which he does of his *infinite* knowledge and power: we shall be ^y *kind* to all, *ready to communicate*; our hearts will be *open* to the distressed and necessitous, and
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^u Matth. xxii. 37. ^w Psal. c. 4. ^x Rom. ii. 4.
^y Ephes. iv. 32. I Tim. vi. 18.

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consequently our *hands*, if we have any thing to bestow : we shall be *placable* and easy to forgive, ² *patient towards all men*, and never abandon our endeavours of reforming another till his behaviour declares his condition to be absolutely hopeless. A confirmed habit of goodness and benevolence expressing itself in all these, and other ways that may be thought on, is perhaps the *most beautiful* feature in a life of virtue and religion ; and at the same time gives a man the *nearest* resemblance to the Deity. Shall any then pretend to *walk worthy of God*, who neglect all acts of kindness, and charity, and compassion to their fellow-creatures ? vain are all such pretences, and those that flatter themselves with them most wretchedly and ruinously deceived.

3. THE *truth* of God relates to his *declarations* and *promises*, in all which he preserves the greatest *sincerity*, and the most inflexible *faithfulness* ; his *secret* will being perfectly agreeable to his *revealed*, and all his dealings with his creatures with the promises he hath made them. *He cannot lie* or deceive ; he cannot misrepresent things to the minds of men in order to draw them into hurtful errors ; nor in any the smallest tittle falsify his sacred word. And to be *worthy of God* in respect of this attribute, what

² 1 Thess. v. 14.

what must be the *character* of our *minds*? what the *manner* of our *conversation*? the very same that constitutes a virtuous and good life. We must *abhor* all *deceit*, whether in our transactions with *God*, or our *fellow-creatures*; with regard to our fellow-creatures, who cannot see into our hearts, and consequently are liable to be imposed upon by us; and with regard to *God*, ^a *who seeth not as man seeth*, having a thorough insight into the most secret recesses of the soul. But not for this reason *only* are we to be sincere in our approaches to *God*, that 'tis *in vain* to be otherwise; but because truth and sincerity are *intrinsically* amiable and good. ^b *God requireth truth in the inward parts*; nor is this the effect merely of arbitrary will and pleasure, since reason and virtue likewise demand it, and are not to be satisfied without it. We are to *say* nothing but what we know or believe to be *true*; and to *promise* nothing but what we firmly *intend* to *perform*, and do *actually* perform if we are *able*, and can do it lawfully. Nor must we do any thing by which another may be ensnared to his hurt. We are to be inviolably attach'd to the truth, and upon no pretence, no temptations whatsoever, to desert it. Herein we shall imitate the *God*
of

^a 1 Sam. xvi. 7.^b Psal. li. 6.

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of truth, ^c *who keepeth covenant for ever,*
and never alters the thing that is gone out of
his mouth. There is also something farther
necessary to make our behaviour *fully worthy*
of the *truth* and faithfulness of God; and
that is, our being induc'd by this attribute to
put our *trust* in God, and making it our
earnest and most *assiduous care* to obtain a
title to his *promises*, with an *absolute confi-*
dence and *satisfaction* of mind, that what-
ever blessing in time or eternity God has
promised, is as sure as if we had actually
received it. Thus, from a brief survey
of the moral attributes of God, it appears,
that a *holy and good life* is the *only life*
worthy of God. This is so, being an imi-
tation of God in his imitable perfections,
and those in which he expects we should
imitate him, and will not accept us if we
do not. Hereby the *image*, and the *love*,
and the *life* of God are perfected in us; and
we represent God in those things which ren-
der him truly amiable and excellent in the
eyes of all those beings who have not lost
their original uprightness. The *apostate spi-*
rits of darkness have more of the *natural*
image of God than good men have, a more
extensive *knowledge* and greater degree of
power, which instead of being an advantage
to their character, renders it more hateful.
The

c Psal. lxxxix. 28, 34.

The greater their knowledge, the greater their guilt in acting contrary to it: the greater their power, the more detestable that malignity of nature which carries them to use it only in doing mischief. God is more honourably represented by a sincerely good and honest man, though otherwise of the meanest abilities, than by the prince of the fallen angels. And consequently those great men who are respected as a kind of gods upon earth, and do indeed reflect some rays of the power, and majesty, and dominion of God; if they have nothing to recommend them but these things, nothing of true virtue and goodness in their character; are really inferior to the meanest of their subjects who are *followers of that which is good*; less *worthy of esteem*, because they behave less *worthy of God*.

3. THE same thing is evident, if to the *moral* attributes of God, we add the consideration of his *other* perfections; such as his *eternity*, *immensity*, *infinite knowledge* and *almighty power*. For when these perfections are taken in conjunction with the other, they compleat the idea of God, and command the praise and adoration of all intelligent beings. 'Tis true, were there no connection between the natural and moral attributes in God, that is, were he *eternal* and *omnipresent*, and *all-knowing* and *all-powerful*,
but

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but not *holy*, *just*, and *good*, there would then be no more connection between the *consideration* of these *natural* perfections in God, and an obligation to *moral virtue* in *man*, than in God himself there was between his natural and moral attributes ; nor could any argument for the latter be drawn from the former. But now, when the *same* Being has *all* perfection, *natural* and *moral*, even the natural perfections are a *just* foundation of a right behaviour towards God, and one another, and strongly *enforce* every duty of religion and morality. For if God be *eternal* and *immutable*, I infer that the *reasons* of good and evil, and the respective *differences* between them, are *unchangeable* and *eternal* ; and that we are to *bless*, and *praise*, and *trust* in him *for ever* : since what *he is*, he *always was*, and ever *will be* ; and therefore the same behaviour must be due to him at all times from all intelligent creatures. If God be every *where present* and *omniscient*, so as to know what passes and is done every where (which two perfections I mention together, because they one infer the other) I conclude without hesitation, that there can be no *walking worthy of him*, unless I *always* carry it as in his presence ; doing nothing which I would not do, if I believed and considered that I was perpetually under the eye of a Being, who cannot behold the least sin with
 appro-

approbation : unless I pray to him and trust in him as one ever ^d *nigh to them who call upon him, to them who call upon him in truth.* For my prayers must be the result of inward devotion, the worship I perform in a spiritual manner, my intentions upright, and all my actions done in truth, if I hope to please an omnipresent, omniscient God. As *power likewise belongs unto God, a power uncontroulable, and without bounds ;* for certain, that conduct or way of life must be wisest and best, most agreeable to my own weakness and dependence, and most worthy of the supreme dominion and irresistible power of God, by which I testify a becoming awe and reverence of this almighty Being, and secure my interest in his favour, by which means I make his power my own to all the purposes of safety and happiness. In every view then of the supreme Being, a holy virtuous and good life, or a right temper and habit of soul, exercising and displaying itself in a regular course of good actions, is the *only life worthy of him.* By such a temper and behaviour the reasonable creature either *directly imitates God,* or bears a *correspondence* and conformity to his most adorable perfections. This finishes the second general head, from whence I proceed to consider,

III. THE

^d Psal. cxlv. 18.

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III. THE force of the motive made use of in the text in order to ingage us to such a life, viz. God's having call'd us to his kingdom and glory, which by a figure usual in scripture, is the same as his glorious kingdom. And by this glorious kingdom is meant the kingdom of righteousness and truth set up by the redeemer; glorious now, if compared with the ruinous state of religion in the heathen world, and the imperfect state of it under the dispensation of the law; still more glorious when the chief design of it shall be accomplished, when the Son of God, who is Lord and Head of it, shall ^e appear in his own glory, and in the glory of his father, and of the holy angels, and all his faithful subjects shall be ^f like him, because they shall see him as he is. Hence it is that the Ephesians, who had been Heathens before they were Christians, are exhorted to ^g walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. And the Thessalonians are said to be ^h called by the gospel to salvation, thro' sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. This argument for a holy life is exceeding comprehensive, and with respect to all who seriously and frequently consider it, irresistibly strong and cogent. For,

^e Luke ix. 26. ^f 1 John iii. 2. ^g Eph. iv. 1.
^h 2 Thess. ii. 13.

I. IN the *kingdom of God*, or by his gospel, we have such a *knowledge of the divine nature*, as is not any other way attainable. For tho' the gospel-revelation declares nothing concerning the perfections of God but what reason confirms, and if pure and unprejudic'd, might have clearly and easily discovered; yet 'tis undeniable that mankind were ⁱ *become vain in their imaginations*, and having first corrupted *themselves*, proceeded in the same degree to corrupt the *true and only worthy notion* of God, inso-much that there were very few who had not *turned the truth of God into a lie*, and we may say none who had those just and excellent apprehensions of the deity, which may be drawn from the sacred scriptures, even by persons of the meanest capacity. It is upon this ground that Christians are called upon to ^k *walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*: intimating, that the professors of Christianity have great advantages for increasing in this divine knowledge; and that with an increase in this should be joined a proportionable advance in all virtue and goodness. They are to be ^l *holy in all manner of conversation, because he that has called them is holy*; to be ^m *perfect as their*

ⁱ Rom. i. 21, 25. ^k Col. i. 10. ^l 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.
^m Matt. v. 48. Luke vi. 36.

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their father in heaven is perfect, and merciful as he is merciful. ⁿ They must not walk in the lusts of concupiscence, or in the practice of any other sin, because this would be acting like the Gentiles, who know not God; whereas all the followers of Christ are to be ^o *followers of God as dear children.*

2. IN the kingdom of the Messiah, together with the nature of God, we have his good, and perfect, and acceptable will made known to us; which is another reason why we should walk worthy of God in the practice of universal righteousness. We have a rule of life in no one thing either wrong or defective, instructing us in all the parts of a right behaviour towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves. The morality of the gospel is the most pure, and strict, and excellent; not the least indulgence to any one sin, no irregular practice is winked at, nothing allow'd which had better be let alone than done. In this sense Christianity is the most intolerating religion in the whole world. While the Jewish dispensation stood, polygamy and divorce were, tho' not approved, yet ^p *suffered for the hardness of the peoples hearts*; to whom that law was given; but by the law of Christ both these are forbidden, and every thing else which has the ap-

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pearance

ⁿ 1 Theff. iv. 5. ^o Eph. v. 1. ^p Matt. xix. 8, 9.

pearance of evil. ^a *Evil is not to be done in any case that good may come.* One would think it was otherwise indeed by the almost universal practice of the several denominations of Christians, who seem to have *one* rule for their *behaviour* amongst *themselves*, and *another* for their dealings with those of other parties; and for the promoting of truth, as they call it, that is, the opinions of their own respective sects, and of a good cause, that is, their own, make no scruple of using such methods as the reason of an honest *heathen* would condemn. For this doctrine, of the *means being sanctified by the end*, the church of *Rome* is most infamous; but is not *singular* in it, being too much follow'd in this and some other bad things by other churches who have separated from her communion. But be this to *Christians themselves*; *Christianity* is not chargeable with it, which gives no countenance to what is in itself unjust, and base, and dishonourable, upon any pretence whatsoever. Such is the *purity* of the religion of *Jesus*; and it is as *sublime* as it is pure, obliging its professors to a *heavenly* life and conversation, an abstraction of heart from the world, and contempt of its honours, riches, and pleasures, in comparison of the *glory, honour, and immortality* which are brought to light by the *gospel*.

^a Rom. iii. 8. 2 Tim. i. 10.

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gospel. In which respect how highly does it exceed the religion of *Moses*, tho' likewise from God! And what does this superior excellency of the gospel-morals signify, but that God, the supreme author of this revelation, is so far from having dispensed with the *moral* law, or the eternal law of equity and goodness, under this last manifestation of his grace; that having by his Son propos'd this law to the world in greater perfection than it was ever discovered by reason, or manifested in former revelations, he now expects that the lives of christians should be, if possible, as much better than those of other men, as their rule of life excels all others. Especially may we argue after this manner, when we consider, that if the *precepts* of the gospel are *strict*, the *assistance* promised in the gospel is *answerable*. For the acquisition of *divine virtues*, more liberal measures are imparted of the *divine spirit*. So that this perfect rule is not set before us only to convince us of our weakness, without obliging us to endeavour to live up to it; for what need then of such extraordinary aids? unless it be said, that these aids are not intended for all, and so all besides a select number are obliged to do what they are not able. But this is worse than the other; for how can any representation of the deity dishonour him more than

this, that he sets the duty of men before them, and according to the *usual* construction of words, encourages *all* to expect whatever *assistance* is *necessary* for the performance of it; at the same time *secretly* determining to with-hold it from the greater part, so as only to *insult* that weakness which he seems to *pity*? No, grace is *offer'd* to *all*, and will be *communicated* to *all* who ask and improve it; and there is this very good reason for it, that all professing the gospel are under indispensable obligations to a life of universal piety and goodness. The sum is, that having called us unto his kingdom, and by his own Son, his great vicegerent, published a system of laws the most excellent that ever was, which are henceforward to be accounted the immutable laws of the kingdom; we cannot *walk worthy of God*, unless our conversation is in this respect becoming the gospel.

3. IN *calling us to his kingdom*, God has declared to us his *love* in a manner not to be parallel'd by any manifestations of his kindness to the children of men before. *He has so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* *He gave him to be a propitiation for sin, even the sins of the whole world, or to take a-*
way

[†] John viii. 16. [†] John iv. 10. ii. 2. Hebr. ix. 26.

way sin by the sacrifice of himself; that there might be nothing to hinder our free access to God, and advancement to a blessed and glorious immortality. Had the Son of God come down from heaven for no other reason but to be the *instructor* of mankind, and their great *example*, it had been a wonderful instance of favour and condescension; but that he should be made in *fashion as a man*, in order to *expiate* the sins of men by his *blood*, and be an universal *victim*, as well as teacher and pattern, this sets the love of God before us in the most surprising point of view. And I beseech you, only consider a little, how very easy and obvious the argument for a life of holiness contain'd herein appears. For if Christ *died for sin*, how can we allow ourselves any longer to *live in it*? If such was the *hatred* and *displeasure* of God against *all sin* and *wickedness*, that he would not accept any other sacrifice of atonement but that of his own Son; and such his *love to sinners*, that he was ready to appoint this *most precious* and *expensive* one; can I avoid making this inference, that I am obliged to *hate sin*, and to *love God* more than ever? and if to *love God*, then to love and practise *holiness*, which is the very image of God, and the only thing which can render me acceptable to him, the great aim of

love? Since ^u *the kindness and love of God towards man* (or to express the same in one significant word, which more exactly answers to the original, his *philanthropy*) has so astonishingly appeared, and the *love of Christ* has *emulated* the love of God the Father, we must acknowledge it to be our duty to *love one another even as Christ also has loved us*. And such a love as that we owe to God and our neighbour, in return for the love of the Father, and the Son to us, will be ^w *the fulfilling of the whole law*. 'Tis certain that this argument loses much of its force as it is stated by some; for if they have a right notion of the gospel, the love of God is not love to *all*, but only to a *particular number unknown*; not properly love to *mankind*, and to the *world*, as it is stiled in scripture, but to the *elect*, who enjoy that title by *mere arbitrary will and pleasure*. The consequence of which is, that all but the *elect* having no interest in this love, can be under no obligations to improve it as a motive to obedience. Since whatever force it may have in itself, it can have none to them; nay nor to the *elect*, till they are able to make out their election. Till then they may, for ought they know, be found among the reprobate part of mankind, from whom no thanks are due for redeeming love,

^u Titus iii. 4. ^w Rom. xiii. 10.

love, which was not designed to put them in a better condition than they would otherwise have been in, but a much worse. I may add farther, that supposing persons to have a moral certainty of their own election, yet even to them the motive to a holy life could not so *properly* be drawn from the *love* of God, because, truly speaking, there would be no *such thing* as love. The *effect*, indeed, might be the *same* as if love had the direction; but if the *original* cause is absolute *sovereignty*, love or goodness has nothing to do in the whole affair. In that case, as God does not exclude the *reprobate* from happiness out of any *hatred* to them, but only to show his irresistible *power*; so the *elect* are ordained to happiness only as an example of the *same* uncontroulable power in another way; not that he has any more love to them, or regard to their happiness as *theirs*, than he has to the forlorn part of mankind. So *plain* and so *pernicious* a tendency hath this doctrine of *absolute* decrees to enervate the most powerful motives of the gospel. Thanks be to God, the contrary truth is as clear as noon-day, in the scripture-revelation, to those who take their faith from *thence*, and not from the *writings* of men. The love of God in sending his son into the world to save sinners, is a consideration alike fitted to be urg'd with all who enjoy
the

the gospel: and therefore whatever christian knowingly and wilfully offends against the laws of either table, he cannot love God and man, as the love of God in his Son *Jesus Christ* requires, and in that respect walks very unworthy of him.

FINALLY, in *calling us to his kingdom*, God has revealed his *glory* to us: that is, a state of *transcendent* and *everlasting* felicity; of which that external splendor, with which the bodies of the just shall be clothed after the resurrection, will be an imperfect figure, or signification. When each part of man, the body and the soul, and all the faculties of both, shall be raised to the highest degree of perfection, and then be possess'd of every object of enjoyment suited to such perfect faculties without interruption or end, and which will be the very case in respect of all true christians, what room will there be left for unaccomplished desires? Well may this happiness be described under the notion of *rest*, since those desires, which were never at rest before, will then be so; and the human heart, so given to wander from object to object, shall find its proper center, and there fix for ever, not feeling any opposite attraction. Upon account of this future blessed and glorious state, which is the expectation of all the faithful in Christ, God is very properly said in the text to have

I *called*

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called us to his kingdom and glory. For the kingdom of *grace* is but an *introduction* to the kingdom of *glory*, in which all good men shall be assembled at the consummation of ages; and then it will appear how infinitely this kingdom surpasses in true glory all the kingdoms of the world. And how little visible soever (unless it be in their lives) the distinction may be at present between the righteous and the wicked, men of the most sincere piety and virtue, and others, a more manifest difference will hereafter be made between them, when ^{*} *the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father, and as the stars for ever and ever*; while the wicked of the earth shall be condemned to *everlasting shame and darkness*. The holiness of the heavenly state will constitute a great part of its glory. 'Tis the glory of that city, *whose builder and maker is God*, [†] *that nothing that defileth can enter there*: not one unholy spirit; nay, not one spirit having the least remains of sin, is to be found in all that vast assembly. This shows in what God most delights, even holiness; to promote which divine quality among mankind, and to bring it at last to a state of perfection, has been the ultimate design of God in all the dispensations of religion and providence. And surely then,
after

^{*} Matt. xiii. 43. Dan. xii. 2, 3. [†] Revel. xxi. 27.

after God has thus display'd his peculiar love of holiness in the glorious rewards of the next life, there can be no farther doubt made, that the only conversation *worthy of God, the Christian's God*, is one which is *holy* in every scene, and part, and instance of it.

GIVE me leave now briefly to *apply* this subject, by way of *inference* and *exhortation*.

I. THE *inference* is, that *christians*, generally speaking, are *not* such a sort of persons as they ought to be; for then they would be remarkable for ² *all holy conversation and godliness*: whereas a very little observation may convince us, that vice and wickedness, of every kind and degree, prevail among them; even vices which should not be *once named among christians*. Alas! what is there *worthy of God*, and the *manifestations* he has made in the gospel, of his *nature*, his *will*, his *love*, and his *glory*, in the common characters of the christian world? Is this *walking worthy of God, who hath called them to his kingdom and glory*, to be *sensual* and *intemperate*, *lovers of pleasure*, and of *filthy lucre*? to *lie*, and *cheat*, and practise a thousand *mean* and *wicked arts*? to *calumniate*, and *bite*, and *devour one another*? to be *more zealous* for *disputable opinions*, and *trifling obser-*

² 2 Pet. iii. 11.

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observances, than for the *weightier matters* both of the *law* and the *gospel*, the eternal obligations of moral righteousness, and the substantial virtues of a truly good life? and to *cover over* some of the most *unjustifiable* things with a *pretence* of religion, nay, of higher degrees of it than ordinary? or to espouse *principles*, and contend for them as the *very truth* of the *gospel*, the *faith once delivered to the saints*, which will warrant the greatest licentiousness? Is this thinking and acting *worthy of God*? this a behaviour becoming those who are called into his glorious kingdom?

2. *Suffer a word of exhortation*, and let us all think ourselves concerned to lead such a life as may in some measure be *worthy of God*, the *holy God*. It was advice given to a *hero*, who, according to the fabulous language of *pagan antiquity*, was derived from the gods,

*Aude, hospes, contemnere opes, & te quoque
dignum*

Finge Deo —

Virg. *Æn.* 1. 8.

“ Dare to despise wealth, and frame thy
“ self not to appear unworthy of thy hea-
“ venly birth, and the honours to which
“ thou art destin’d.” All good men are
the *children of God*, but in a *nobler* sense,
and

and *designed* for *immortality*. Their father is their *pattern* and their *rewarder*. We must be sensible that a life worthy of God will not admit of a *sensual* and *worldly* spirit, an *envious*, a *selfish* or *revengeful* spirit and disposition ; nay, or a spirit of *indifference* and *indivotion* : That to deserve so *high* a character, it must be *fill'd* with the practice of every virtue of which human nature is capable ; though, if I might be allow'd to set an emphasis upon one where all are excellent, I would say, *especially* animated and adorned with *goodness* and *benevolence*. It is the amiable character of the Deity, that ^a *he is love* ; and it is the *honour* of our *religion*, that it thus represents him ; and not only commands us to imitate him herein, but makes it so easy and natural for us to do it. That christian knows little of the true spirit of his religion, who does not feel his heart enlarged by it, so as to be *wide* enough to lodge *all* mankind ; who regards no interest but his own, or that of his party ; carrying it at best like a *stranger*, if not like an *enemy* to all others. This man dishonours the gospel, and is justly punished for it by his ignorance of one of the divinest pleasures of which the heart of man is capable ; the pleasure of an universal disinterested kindness and goodwill.

^a 1 John iv. 8.

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will. Let us, my friends, make it our laudable ambition to be as like God in this, and every other respect, as we can. And let me add by way of motive, that there is enough in a life of virtue and goodness, consider'd in this particular view, as a life *worthy of God*, to recommend it to the esteem and choice of every wise man. I shall mention but three properties, without being large upon them, which will prove it such, and conclude. 'Tis *pleasant*, 'tis *honourable*, and 'tis *blessed*; pleasant and honourable *now*, and will be inconceivably blessed in the *end*.

I. 'TIS *pleasant immediately*, delightful under all the disadvantages of the present state, where the virtues of the good man are so imperfect, and the natural fruits of his virtue are so often intercepted; where there is so much opposition to be conquer'd both from within and from without; such a *fight of temptations and afflictions* in the world, and such a *body of sin and death*: notwithstanding all this, it is most certainly true, that ^b *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness*. By the *ways of wisdom* are meant the ways of *religion*; and to prove these the ways of *wisdom*, nothing more is necessary than their being so evidently the ways of *pleasantness* and *peace*. Consider,
there

^b Prov. iii. 17.

there is the best and surest foundation laid for peace and pleasure in such a life as this; for *inward* peace, by *peace with God*; by *order* and *rectitude* in the faculties; a *pure* conscience; affections placed upon the *noblest* objects, and a course of actions directed to the *highest* end by rules of the *clearest* reason; and must not the result of all this be pleasure? pleasure and peace in the midst of outward troubles, under all the unjust reproaches of a misjudging world, and the censure and hard usage of the *mistaken* friends of religion? As long as the christian can appeal from all these to his own heart, and to God, ^c *who is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things*, he is as far from *needing pity* as from *deserving reproach*.

2. THIS life is the most *honourable*: the thing bespeaks itself. God is the *fountain of honour*, the *God of glory*. The nearer approaches any being makes to the Deity, the more must he reflect of his brightness. Can there be an expression of greater dignity than this, the *life of God*, by which a holy life is signified and represented to us? 'tis a life formed in imitation of God: what God is in his *infinite* sphere, that the pious virtuous soul is in his *finite* one: he is *imperfectly* the same that God is in *perfection*; and sure I am, that this is the
greatest

^c 1 John iii. 20.

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greatest thing which can be said of any being whatsoever, that he *is*, and that he *acts like God*. This is true honour, and the greater the similitude, the greater is the honour and glory.

3. IN its state of *consummation* it will be a *most blessed* life. There is a time approaching, when all men of upright hearts shall be made *perfect in holiness*; when, and not till when, they shall be *perfectly happy*. Among the titles of the supreme Being, this is one; that he is the ^d *blessed God*, infinitely blessed or happy, because infinitely good; and in the same proportion as any of his creatures bear the image of his goodness, they shall exhibit that of his blessedness too. This is that state of perfection to which we should be continually looking forward, which should be the *subject* of our *frequent* meditations; and were it so, would be more than it is, the *object* of our ambitious desires, and most unwearied endeavours and pursuits. Did we think of heaven more than we do, as a state of perfect holiness and blessedness, we should then, while on earth, desire nothing so much as to be with God in heaven; and make it our constant aim and business to lead the life of heaven, as far as it is to be done here upon earth.

VOL. III.

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SER-

^d 1 Tim. vi. 15.



S E R M O N XIII.

The Duty of Praise and Thank-
giving.

Preach'd on NEW YEAR'S-DAY, 1735.

PSAL. CXXXVI. I.

*O give thanks unto the Lord, for
he is good, for his mercy endureth
for ever.*

PRAISE is the everlasting employment of the heavenly state, for which we are to be train'd by the exercises of faith, and hope, and love, of contemplation and devotion, and such imperfect essays of thanksgiving as we are capable of while sojourners here. 'Tis a satisfaction to reflect, that the very duty of praise, especially being attended with so much pleasure in the performance, shows our condition to be full of hope; and that ^a *God has not appointed us to wrath,*
but

^a 1 Theff. v. 9.

but to obtain salvation and happiness, as the end of our creation, and reward of our sincere piety and obedience; since otherwise, such a word of exhortation as this in the text would be very improperly address'd to those who had no reason, upon the whole, to bless God for their being; and therefore could not be supposed, by the very frame of their nature, to receive the highest satisfaction and delight from the knowledge and adoration of the author of it.

IN discoursing of this subject, I shall briefly make the following enquiries :

I. CONCERNING the duty to which we are here invited.

II. THE persons called upon to perform it. And,

III. THE reason or foundation of it here assigned.

I. LET us briefly enquire into the nature of the duty to which we are here invited; *O give thanks unto the Lord.* Thanksgiving, in the general notion of it, implies two things, *viz.* a *grateful sense* of the divine benefits, and a *suitable expression* of this gratitude.

1. THE duty of thanksgiving implies, or supposes, a *grateful sense* of the divine benefits. Here the duty *begins*, though it *ends*

not here ; in acts of the *mind*, in attentive *meditations* on the loving-kindness of God, and lively warm *affections* produc'd and cherish'd by these meditations. It is for this reason the *Psalmist* so often enters into a devout soliloquy with his own soul, particularly in the ciii^d *Psalm*, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name ! bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ! i. e.* willingly forget none. Praise is most *directly* and *properly* the employment of the *soul*, the noblest exercise of our noblest faculties ; the understanding, the will, the memory, and the heart : the understanding lends its light and knowledge ; the will its deliberate choice and fixed determination ; the memory its store-house of ideas ; and the heart its train of passions. Gratitude has its abode within, there is its fountain and original : no sacrifice will be accepted where this fire is wanting ; no songs of praise can have any harmony in the divine ear, if we do not ^b *make melody in our hearts unto the Lord*. And there is the justest reason for this ; since ^c *there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding*. And where the intercourse is between *spiritual beings*, between a created spirit and the uncreated, the way of *communication* must be *spiritual*.

^b Eph. v. 19.^c Job xxxii. 8.

spiritual. If the spirit presents and offers up the body, but not itself, the offering is essentially defective, unsuitable to the excellence of man, and unworthy of the infinite majesty of God.

2. THERE must be *suitable expressions* of gratitude; and these there will be, wheresoever the thing itself is to be found. Where the body is under the command of a thankful spirit, we shall ^a *glorify God both with our bodies and with our spirits, which are his.* The heart will awaken the tongue, and the affections of the inner man direct and influence the actions of the outward. These expressions of thanksgiving either regard the *ordinary* course of the life, or the more *solemn* services of religion. The whole course of the life may have the nature of a continual thanksgiving; and such, in fact, is the life of every truly good man: for by *yielding his members instruments of righteousness unto God, he shows forth the praises of God*; and declares his sense of the divine goodness more effectually than he could do it in any other way. Nay, any other way of giving thanks to God without this (as for instance, *honouring him with our lips*, while we are dishonouring of him in our lives) would be no better than solemn mockery, and so accounted both by God

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and

and man. Would we acknowledge our obligations to the supreme Being in a pleasing and worthy manner, let us do it by a steady course of virtue and piety; for a holy and good life, animated by a sense of our obligations to the divine goodness, is a kind of *perpetual* hymn of praise to God. Such a life is a proper expression of gratitude, as it is a continued act of obedience to the law of God, and reflects the image of his moral perfections, the brightest glory of the Deity. The *other* way of giving thanks, or expressing gratitude, is by the *solemn services* of religion: *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name.* We are to bless God in the *closet*, in the *family*, and in the *congregation of his saints*. It is very remarkable, that the whole service of the *Jewish* choir is described by this part of it; *and with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest, who were express'd by name, to give thanks unto the Lord, because his mercy endureth for ever.* And without all doubt, thanksgiving is one of the most excellent and beautiful *parts* of divine worship; we may, in some sense, say the *whole*, since every other part of worship should be guided and animated by this. In *adoration*, *confession*, and *petition*, we should give thanks: for

^e Psal. c. 4.

^f 1 Chron. xvi. 41.

for what is *adoration* but a sort of thanksgiving, as often as we are moved by the love of God to the contemplation, and acknowledgment of his infinite perfections, that we are capable of such raised acts of the mind, and intitled to the favour of so glorious a Being? what else is *confession* of sin, when our hatred of it proceeds from our love to God; and we have the more pungent sense of its evil, because we have a lively and affecting sense of the divine goodness? In proportion as we are thankful to God for his mercies, we are sorry for our sins; and finding ourselves in such an ingenuous frame of spirit, we are thankful to God for it. And how can we but regard *petition* in this light, as only another way of giving thanks; when we consider, that whatever blessing a thankful heart asks of God, it asks it for this, as one principal reason, that it may be in a better condition to praise and glorify the author of all good? But whether it be, or be not, thus proper to resolve the *whole* of religious worship into thanksgiving, very certain it is, that thanksgiving is one of the most excellent and divine parts of it. This we may learn from the value which God himself puts upon it, when he saith, *He that offereth praise, glorifieth me*: he does it most eminently and most directly. ^h *Let us therefore come before his presence with thanksgiving,*

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^s Psal. l. 23.^h Psal. xciv. 2.

giving, and ⁱ exalt his name together ; let us commemorate his benefits, and talk of all his wondrous works ; let our souls magnify the Lord, and let his praise continually be in our mouths. Him let us acknowledge as the author of existence to all ; the fountain and father of mercies, to whose free and unmerited favour we are indebted for all we are, have, or can do ; for our beings, for all the advantageous and happy circumstances of our beings ; for every thing we possess or hope ; our freedom from evil, our enjoyment of good, our capacity of happiness, and the prospects and means of attaining the utmost happiness of which we are capable ; in a word, for temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings, all which are either actually bestow'd, or graciously and expressly promis'd. Such acknowledgments as these should make a great part of the worship of reasonable creatures, as we are ; who, tho' we have forfeited the mercy of God our heavenly Father, are not depriv'd of it, and never shall be, unless we forget to be obedient and grateful.

So much for the first enquiry, or concerning the duty to which we are here invited, *giving of thanks* : which implies two things ; a *grateful sense* of the divine benefits ; and *suitable expressions* of our gratitude, both

ⁱ Psal. xxxiv. 1, 3.

both in the *course* of a holy and virtuous life, and by more *exprefs* and *solemn* oblations of praise and blessing when we come to worship before God.

II. THE next enquiry is, Who are the *persons* called upon to give thanks unto the Lord, or to whom does *David* speak this? Perhaps to *all intelligent beings*, whatever world they inhabit; since, wheresoever they dwell, God is present with them to receive their homage and adoration; and whatsoever degrees of perfection and happiness they enjoy, they owe them to his free and overflowing bounty. But to bring our thoughts within a narrower compass, I shall only pursue this enquiry as it concerns the *children of men*.

I. THEN, the *whole world of mankind* are by the *Psalmist* invited to pay their common tribute of praise to their supreme and universal Lord; even all the nations of this wide-spread and many-peopled earth, by whatever name, or language, or religion they are distinguish'd; seeing how much soever they differ in these and other respects, they all partake of the light of reason, which discovers a God to them, a first and most perfect Being, and directs them to make him the universal object of their worship, and trust,

trust, and obedience. * *Sing unto the Lord, all the earth, shew forth his salvation from day to day; declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised, he is to be feared above all gods; for all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the earth, give unto the Lord, glory and strength; give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him, all the earth.* So that in the text we may suppose the Psalmist to signify the obligations that men were under every where, renouncing all false gods and false modes of worship, to pay their religious acknowledgments to the God of heaven only, inasmuch as these idol gods cannot do either good or evil. ¹ *Can any of these vanities give rain?* was the world made, or is it govern'd by them? then indeed we could not expect that their worshippers should turn from them to serve our God; because they also, upon this supposition, would be living and true gods: But verily there is ^m *but one God, of whom are all things; to whom therefore the glory of all is to be ascribed.* ⁿ *Of his goodness the earth is full,*
it

* Psal. xcvi. 1, &c. 1 Chron. xvi. 23. ¹ Jer. xiv. 22. ^m 1 Cor. viii. 6. ⁿ Psal. xxxiii. 5. cxv. 16.

it is he who hath given it to the children of men ; ° who sendeth them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness; whom therefore they ought to worship; and ^p whom they do ignorantly worship. To him they cry in their trouble, those who wander in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty till their soul fainteth in them; those that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, being bound with affliction and iron : those that go down unto the sea in ships, and are tols'd by tempests, so that their soul melteth in them : these, and others too many to name, cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. The Lord is their Saviour, to whom, without having a distinct notion of him, they address their prayers, not immediately, not in a way acceptable to him, but through idol mediators, whom he has not appointed; for which reason God might justly turn away his ear from their cry; but on the contrary he is gracious to them, and in the course of his providence bestows numberless blessings upon them. Well therefore might the Psalmist say, O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. See the cviith Psalm throughout. These words express his earnest wishes, and we should join

° Acts xiv. 17.

^p Acts xvii. 23.

join with him in them, that he who is the author of *all the good* which mankind enjoy, may have *all the praise*. And perhaps they contain also a secret prayer for the conversion of *heathen* nations to the true religion; that ^a *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the name of the Lord may be one, and his praise one*; instead of the multitude of names by which the gods of the nations were called (themselves mere names) and the variety of superstitious rites which were used in their worship.

2. THE *church of God* is more immediately and expressly spoken to in these words. Those who are in a more eminent manner the *redeemed of the Lord, his peculiar people*, ^r *Remember his marvellous works that he has done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth. O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen ones: He is the Lord our God, be ye mindful always of his covenant, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.* The *Christian church* succeeding to the *Jewish* in all their titles and advantages of a spiritual nature, and having new dignities, and richer favours and blessings superadded, more liberal communications of knowledge and grace, a greater freedom of access to the mercy-seat, through
Jesus

^a Mal. i. 11. Zech. xiv. 9. ^r 1 Chron. xvi.
12 --- 15.

Jesus Christ the *one Mediator*, who during the time of the law was to come, but is now come, and return'd again unto the Father ; and by *one Spirit*, of which there is a more plentiful effusion under the gospel dispensation ; having the truth more fully and nakedly revealed, and promises of future and eternal blessings more express, and in greater abundance ; the reason is much more evident, why all professing the gospel should ' *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places and things, and begotten us to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.*

3. ALL those are particularly called upon to give thanks, who have received *any fresh or remarkable instances of the divine favour and interposition* on their behalf ; such as have been *prospered* in their designs, and perhaps beyond their own expectations ; or have been *happily disappointed* (for frequent experience shows there are such things as happy disappointments) have had *light and comfort* in a day of trouble ; *succour* in threatening dangers and temptations ; have been *raised up* from beds of *sickness*, or *blest'd* with *extraordinary measures of health* ; have had

had considerable turns in their lives, and seen the hand of God *guiding* and *over-ruling* events to their *good*. Some examples of this kind, more or fewer, we must all have had; and unless we have been very careless observers of the dealings of God with us, must have discerned manifest footsteps of his providential care, and fatherly regard to our best interest, and future everlasting happiness. Now, though it be *too common*, after the manner of the antient *Israelites*, to *sing the praises of God, and then forget his works*; yet we can never think such a temper and practice to be at all *justifiable*. When we are in *trouble*, we can *seek God early*, and earnestly; and why then are we not as ready to glorify him after he has delivered us? Why should the mercies of God be like fruitful showers on a barren rock, from which they slide off without making any impression? or like letters written on the water, which leave no mark of themselves behind?

III. LET us now, in the last place, inquire into the *ground, or foundation* of the duty of *praise* and *thanksgiving* to God, here assigned; *for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever*.

1. Men

: Psal. cvi. 12, 13.

1. Men should give thanks unto the Lord, *because he is good.* Goodness is an essential attribute of the divine nature, inseparable from the notion of an all-perfect Being; for, could we suppose any being to have all other excellencies besides, but to be without this one of goodness, it would labour under such a defect, as infinite perfection itself, in every other kind, could not make amends for. 'Tis the voice of *reason* that God is good, and the language of *revelation*. All religion is built upon this truth; "*for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him.*" The works of *creation* and *providence* proclaim the divine benignity by the infinite variety of creatures and capacities for happiness which are form'd, and the infinite supplies of good continually granted; and much more that astonishing work of our *redemption* from *sin* and *death*, and *restoration* to *immortal happiness* by the Son of God incarnate. And what is the natural return for goodness, but love and thankfulness? Other perfections challenge our reverence, and fear, and admiration; this demands our gratitude. And yet though the goodness of God be the only immediate ground of thanksgiving, it will be of very great use in performing this duty, to turn our thoughts
and

and contemplations to all those other glorious and transcendent perfections, which unite in his ever-blessed nature. When we seriously think of his *greatness and majesty*, his goodness will appear the more wonderful, which from the height of his glory *condescends* to take notice of us and our mean affairs. ^w *Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, thou art very great, thou art clothed with honour and majesty.* The greatness of God is *indirectly* an argument why our souls should *bless him*; as it is more *directly* for their holy fear and astonishment. ^x *When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* When to this we add the thoughts of the divine holiness, will it not tend to raise and quicken our thankfulness to God for his *liberal* goodness to such *unworthy polluted* creatures as we are? ^y *Thus saith the High and Holy One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* When, finally, we reflect on the *almighty power* of God, we are sure it is not because he *cannot punish* that he *s pares* us; and that nothing can oppose

^w Psal. civ. 1. ^x Psal. viii. 3, 4. ^y Isai. lvii. 15.

pose and hinder his designs of mercy and favour towards us, provided we ourselves do not defeat them by our own wilful transgressions, and obstinate refusal to follow his guidance. And O what pleasure and satisfaction must arise from hence, when we are meditating on the divine goodness! and what life and spirit must it put into our thanksgivings!

2. MEN should *give thanks unto the Lord, because his mercy endureth for ever.* This may be understood, 1. In *opposition* to the anger of God; 2. To the *favour of men*; and, 3. More *absolutely* of the *unchangeableness* and *perpetuity* of the divine mercy.

1. WHEN it is said of the *mercy of God*, that it *endureth for ever*, it may be meant in *opposition to his anger*. His displeasure kindles slowly, but is quickly extinguished. ^z *He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.* ^a *In a little wrath he may hide his face from his people for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon them.* ^b *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* The reason of this difference is, that ^c *judgment is his strange work, mercy his delight.* Anger itself in God is very often, I may say, generally, the effect of goodness and mercy.

^z Psal. ciii. 9. ^a Isa. liv. 7, 8. ^b Psal. xxx. 5.
^c Mic. vii. 18.

For, because he is in his nature merciful, and a lover of mankind, therefore he is displeas'd with them when they prove so much their own enemies, as by their wilful sins and follies to render themselves altogether unmeet for his favour, as well as unworthy of it. He would show them the path of life, and they will not accept of his guidance.

2. THIS may be understood in *opposition* to the *favour* of *men*, which is too *uncertain* to be relied on. ^d Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the ballance they are altogether lighter than vanity. Their *circumstances* change, and with them their *views*, and *purposes*, and *affections*; or, it may be, they alter without any such occasion for it, from a *mere fickleness* of nature: or, suppose the best, that their friendship is as permanent as their being; yet how little can we build upon it, when their *life* itself ^e is a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away? ^f Wherefore cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for, wherein is he to be accounted of? Put not your trust in the son of man, in whom there is no help; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that day his thoughts perish. Happy therefore

^d Psal. lxii. 9.
Psal. xlv. 3, 4.

^e James iv. 14.

^f Isa. ii. 22.

fore he, who hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is therein, who keepeth truth for ever.

3. WE may consider these words as more *absolutely* spoken, and intended to signify the *constancy*, and *perpetual duration* of the divine mercy. Mercy, like time, flows on with a smooth and easy current, and too often, alas! is as little regarded as that. Mercy smiles upon us with the dawn of every day, and with the return of every night draws a curtain of rest and protection about us. Come therefore, let us *give thanks to him* * *who made great lights, the sun to rule the day, for his mercy endureth for ever; and the moon and the stars to rule by night, for his mercy endureth for ever.* But these glorious luminaries were placed in the firmament of heaven, not only to *divide the day from the night*, but to be ^h *for signs and for seasons, for days and for years; and, while the earth remaineth, seed-time, and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer, and winter, as well as day and night, shall not cease.* The several parts and divisions of the year have not the very same delights, but are all delightful, and the more delightful for this variety; one perhaps less agreeable than another, but all beautiful in their season: and as *day unto*

B b 2

night

* Psal. cxxxvi. 7—9. ^h Gen. i. 14. viii. 22.

night uttereth speech, so year unto year sheweth knowledge. ⁱ He crowneth the year with his goodness, and all his paths drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. In other words, he adorns and loads the year with the testimonies of his bounty; so that being as it were crowned with rich and smiling plenty, it rejoices in its own abundance; and whithersoever his chariot turns, the wheels thereof scatter a general moisture, and fatten the lands over which they go. Who is there but must acknowledge, on a sober review of the time past, that *goodness and mercy have follow'd him all the days of his life*? that if he has *possessed days or months of vanity*, his own *misgovernment* of himself has made them so; while, in respect of the goodness of God to him, and the kind purposes of all his providential dispensations, he has had years of mercy, in which he must thank himself that he has not taken more true pleasure? By what means have we escaped safe in the midst of so many evils and dangers? by *whom*, or by *what*, have we been guided through them? Be it known to you, not by your *own* wisdom, or foresight, or care, or power; nor must we ascribe it to *chance* (an empty sound, which can effect nothing) that we have
come

ⁱ Psal. lxxv. 11, 12.

come off so well: no, but we have been kept to this day by the *good hand* of God; and, through his great goodness towards us, are now before him, rejoicing in his mercy, which *endureth for ever*. The mercy of God began with life, and accompanies us to the end of it: ^k *He took us from the womb, and made us to hope in him from our mother's breast.* His providence was the nurse of our infancy, the guardian of our childhood, the guide of our youth, and is, or will be, the support of our age: the life of a good man, especially, is under the conduct and care of divine providence; and ^l *to him all things are made to work together for good.*

AND not only from day to day, and from year to year, and from the beginning of life to the end of it, does the *mercy of God* continually *endure*; but from *age to age*, even from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things: for, while one *generation passeth away, and another cometh,* ^m *his faithfulness is unto all generations.* He *has established the earth, and it abideth; they continue to this day according to his ordinance, for they are all his servants.* His mercy has already endured as long as the human race, which owes its continuance to his long-suffering and forbearance. ⁿ *'Tis of his mercy,*

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that

^k Psal. xxii. 9. ^l Rom. viii. 28. ^m Psal. cxix. 90, 91. ⁿ Lam. iii. 22.

that this simple race of creatures *is not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* Consider, *Sirs*, he has suffered our evil manners for near these six thousand years; and in every age has been drawing men by the cords of love, and using a variety of methods in the dispensations of his providence, to reform and improve them; and why, but that they might be happy in his favour? Notwithstanding which, mankind, for the greater part, are much the same they ever were, and, with their *species*, transmit their *sins*, and *errors*, and *follies*, through an endless succession of times. So much the rather let us adore that patience, which is not wearied out with the general depravity of mankind, and their repeated rebellions in the several ages of the world; and let ^o *one generation praise his works to another, and abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness.*

THE church of God is in a peculiar manner the charge of his providence. This is the scene in which his mercy is most illustriously display'd; here *he will dwell for ever.* ^p *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto childrens children.* 'Tis a sort of inheritance to which they have a traditionary claim. And O what can be
more

^o Psal. cxlv. 4, 7. ^p Psal. ciii. 17.

more reviving to pious parents when they are just leaving the world, or looking forward to that time, than to think that they are allow'd, with a humble confidence in the mercy and faithfulness of the Almighty, to commend their children to his tuition, who has promis'd that *'the children of his servants shall continue, and their seed be established before him.*

LET us carry our view yet farther, and consider that the mercy of the Lord does not only *reach* from one end of *time* to the other, but *overflow* all the *bounds* of *time*; and, with regard to all those who love and fear him, may be *strictly* said to *endure* for ever. In the events of time, mercy is under a veil, and in a state of war with the lusts, and passions, and prejudices of men; hereafter it will reign, and triumph. Then there will be nothing to check and abate the exercises of it, either in *God* or *men*: the stream will run pure, and branch out into rivers of pleasure, which being perpetually fed from the fountain of life, will be always full, and keep flowing on to eternity.

I SHALL close all with a suitable application.

I. DOES religion invite and oblige us to *give thanks unto the Lord, because he is good?* and does a great part of religion consist in

B b 4

the

the duty of thanksgiving rightly performed? then, certainly, religion can neither be an *unreasonable*, nor a *tiresome* service. Men, indeed, may represent it so to themselves, and give that account of it to others, in order to justify their neglect, and contempt of it; nay, 'tis undeniable that they may make it a heavy yoke, by mingling those doctrines and practices with religion, which are quite contrary to the genius and design of it. The end of religion is the *glory of God* in the *happiness of man*; for the accomplishing which excellent and important end, the exercises of devotion, and frequent acts of praise, and thanksgiving, constitute one of the most direct and principal means. And what is there in this that a *serious* mind will not own to be *reasonable*, and an *ingenuous* mind esteem as most *pleasant*? This is one very good rule, by which to try the spirit, or temper, which is made the characteristic of true piety. Is the spirit recommended to us a narrow, a gloomy, a servile spirit? does it depress, instead of raising; darken, instead of enlightning; sour and embitter, instead of sweetning; contract, instead of dilating; distress, instead of comforting and cheering the mind; increasing its doubts, and fears, and anxieties, when it ought to remove them? does it represent God as an object of terror and affrightment, rather than

than of love and veneration, and tend to alienate the heart from him? Is this not the accidental effect, but the natural temper, bred by certain principles? Plainly, these are not the true principles of religion, nor is this its genuine temper and spirit; for that is a spirit of love, a free and diffusive spirit: whereas this is the very spirit of bondage, and superstition. Contemplation, and praise, and thanksgiving, are the most unnatural employment that can be for such a spirit. A *thankful*, and, as the consequence of that, a *cheerful* frame of mind, does in a peculiar manner become the *christian*; the christian, more than other men, and the devout communicant, more than all other christians. The Lord's-supper, to those who worthily partake of it, and who have not burden'd the scripture-notion of it with the superstitious conceits of men, is admirably fitted to administer great consolation, to fan the fire of divine love, and to tune the heart to thanksgiving, and thereby to enliven the whole frame of religion, and render it a service as delightful as it is reasonable.

2. SINCE the *mercy of the Lord endureth for ever*, let us resolve that we will *serve, and praise, and trust in him for ever*. Let us never willingly offend this merciful God, even because he is merciful, and not merely because he is just too. Let us not follow an
example

example too common, which is to abuse the mercy of God, as an argument to presumption. Let us be so far from being guilty of the thing, as to abhor the thought. And because the *mercy of God is to everlasting upon them that fear him*, let us therefore keep his covenant inviolable, and persevere in well-doing to the end of our lives. And farther, let us say as the *Psalmist*, and with the same sincerity, *I will extol thee, my God, O king, and I will bless thy name for ever and ever: every day I will bless thee, and praise thy name for ever and ever.* Eternity shall be thus employed, if we thus employ our short time; if while *we live we praise the Lord*, not with our tongues only, but in our hearts and lives; after death we shall praise him, and better far than now; for then we shall dwell in the regions of light and glory, be excited by every thing about us, to laud and magnify the God of nature, grace, and glory, and mingle with the holy throng, *who cease not day or night, saying, O praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.* Let us also, as the pious *Psalmist* did, *trust in the mercy of the Lord for ever; his mercy is everlasting.* This will be no less our happiness than our duty; helping to keep our minds calm and unshaken, amidst all the storms and fluctuations of the present life.

That

• Psal. cxlv. 1, 2. † Rev. iv. 8. † Psal. lii. 8.

That mercy, which has never yet forsaken us, never will, if we travel under its conduct. Through the mercy of God towards us, we see the beginning of another year; what events we shall see before it concludes, or whether we shall live to see the conclusion of it, God only knows. However that prove, it will be the wisest thing we can do to trust in God; and cast ourselves, with every care, and grief, and burden, upon his good providence. A thick *darkness* covers *future* time; but what is darkness to *us*, is light to *God*. And forasmuch as to the same God belong knowledge and power without bounds, and mercy without end; notwithstanding our not having the certain foresight of any one event, we have reason to be as well satisfied as if the whole train of events were at once under our view, and subject to our command: since all things shall be as wisely ordered as is possible they should be; infinitely better, than if any one but God had the management of them. On this day 'tis an universal custom for friends and acquaintance to wish one the other a *happy New Year*. We can do little better than *wish* it to *others*; but every one may, in some degree, *make* it so to *himself*: for, though no one has the *disposal* of *events*, yet every one is able to *redeem* his *time*. And, if we take care to fill up our time with pious, and useful,

useful, and good actions, God will fill it up with such events, as his wise mercy knows will most effectually contribute to our furtherance in holiness now, and to our final felicity, which you will all confess is the thing we ought principally to regard.



S E R-



S E R M O N XIV.

On occasion of the Death of a
Young LADY in her 21st Year.

JOHN V. 28, 29.

*Marvel not at this, for the hour
is coming in the which all that
are in the graves shall hear his
voice, and shall come forth; they
that have done good unto the re-
surrection of life, and they that
have done evil to the resurrection
of damnation.*

HARDLY any thing can be conceiv'd
more out of the common course, and
beyond all the known powers of nature, or
that would strike us with greater amaze-
ment,

ment, were it to happen before our eyes, than the *resurrection* of a *dead* body; and yet the world has not been without some instances of this miracle, though few, and upon extraordinary occasions. We read of two, and but two, before the times of the gospel, *i. e.* during the space of about *four thousand* years: the most numerous examples were reserved to honour the appearance of the Son of God upon earth, and to confirm the truth of his religion. This is what our Saviour foretels his hearers, *ver. 25. of this chapter, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.* Which may refer to all the resurrections afterwards effected by Christ himself, or by his apostles, in virtue of that divine power which accompanied them, but perhaps had its principal accomplishment in the wonderful event related by the evangelist, *Matth. xxvii. 50 - - 53. Jesus, when he had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost; and behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and many bodies of saints which slept arose, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.* So powerful is even the dying voice of our Lord, that it breaks in sunder the bars of the pit! it may
be,

be, to signify ^a *that through death he destroyed him that had the power of death.* Whether those dead bodies arose at the same time that the graves were opened, is doubtful; if we follow our *English* translation, we must suppose it was not till after our Saviour's resurrection: but the *original*, when more exactly render'd, will admit of another sense; *and coming out of the graves, after his resurrection, went into the holy city, and appeared unto many:* as if the graves were opened, and the dead saints, hearing the voice of their expiring Lord, *immediately* left their graves, though they appeared not in *Jerusalem* till after he was risen. However, it must be own'd the more probable opinion, that the resurrection of those dead saints was subsequent to that of our Saviour, as a sort of specimen, or representation in little, of the final resurrection of the just, of whom ^b *Christ* rose as the *first-fruits*. In raising the dead, Christ did not, as his apostles, barely utter the words, upon which the effect follow'd; but acted by a power inherent in himself, though derived from the Father, the supreme fountain of all power and authority. So he says, *ver. 26, 27. For as the Father hath life in himself, a life-giving power, so has he given to the Son to have life in himself,* by communicating a like power
to

^a Heb. ii. 14.^b 1 Cor. xv. 20.

to him, *and has given him authority to execute judgment*, to reward and punish, *because he is the Son of man*, the *Messiah* promised under that title: but, saith he, *marvel not at this*, at what I now tell you, of my power to raise the dead; no, not when you shall see it exerted; which we are to understand only in a comparative sense, that however surprising the spectacle of a dead body returning to life might be, the wonder did as it were vanish, when they carried their view forward to the general and final resurrection of the dead. *The hour cometh*, he does not add as before, *and now is*, because the event was then, and very likely still is at a very great distance; the *hour* or time will come, *when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice*. *Till now*, a few only, and those *not long* dead, were raised, and raised again to this mortal life, and a continuance of their state of trial, (whether we must not except those who attended upon our rising Saviour, I do not know.) *Now all* the dead, from the *beginning* to the *end* of the world, of whom the greater part have slept in the dust for many ages, rise to a state of everlasting recompences. Must not the very thought of such a scene as this, if we firmly believe, and seriously consider it, fill our minds with a secret dread and astonishment!

THE

SER. XIV. *Death of a Young Lady.* 385

THE words contain in them the following most important points of instruction :

I. THAT there will be a *resurrection of all the dead.*

II. THE *person* to whom this glorious work of raising the dead will be committed, is *Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

III. THOUGH all men are to be raised, yet not to the same, but *vastly different states* ; some passing into a state of *rewards*, others of *punishment*, and both of them *inexpressibly great.*

IV. THE *foundation* of this amazing difference in the *final* states of men, is an *answerable difference* in their *actions* and *behaviour* while they live in this world.

I. THERE will be a *resurrection of all the dead.* 'Tis not more certain from the original sentence, *‘Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,* confirmed by universal observation and experience, that all must die ; than from the same divine appointment recorded in the sacred writings it is, that they shall all be made alive again. Death first succeeds to life, then life to death ; and we should find it of very great use to connect these two opposite views of

‘ Gen. iii. 19.

men together, as now dying, and at the time fixed for it in the decree of God, rising from the dead. Shortly this body shall return to the earth *from which it was taken* : 'tis now a living body, and the instrument of a thousand operations to the soul ; it will then be void of all life and motion, wan, cold and insensible. 'Tis now made up of a great number and variety of parts, fram'd and put together by the most admirable skill, at once to serve for *ornament and use* ; in a little time the whole structure will be quite dissolved, what was dust become dust again, and not the least trace or sign remain by which it may be distinguish'd from any other matter. The *man*, as a *compound* being, dies with his *body* ; and the man dying, his state of trial ends. As we love this life, and much more as we are related to another, this is a most awful and affecting thought ; especially as the change in this mortal part, from a living organized body, to a lump of clay, or heap of dust, may be much *nearer* than I imagine. To raise the attention of my mind, and alarm its passions yet more, I consider that my body will not lie for ever in this unactive insensible state ; the time will come, when being *new form'd*, it shall be *re-united* to the soul, which will open a new and most surprising scene or state of existence.

'Tis

'Tis not unlikely, that the *advantage* of meditating on *death* and the resurrection, and as it were bringing them into one prospect, was in the thoughts of the young gentlewoman, whose death is so much and so deservedly lamented ; when, for the subject to be discoursed on at her interment, she chose these words of our Saviour, ^d *What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch* ; and for that of this day, the prediction of the same divine person, concerning the general resurrection ; rightly judging, that she could not leave with her surviving friends and acquaintance any more salutary advice, or wherein she could better express her earnest wishes of their welfare and happiness than this ; that they would think frequently of death and the resurrection, and make it their constant and serious endeavour to prepare for this awful time. Yes, - - a resurrection there will be, when something like, but very much surpassing what happened to the prophet ^e *Ezekiel in vision*, shall *really* come to pass : for as in that visionary representation, *the bones came together bone to its bone, and the sinews and the flesh came upon the bones, and the skin covered them again, after which the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army* : so shall it be in the end of the world.

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^d Mark xiii. 37. ^e Ezek. xxxvii. 1.

world. Nay, then not only *bone shall come together to its bone*, but dust to its dust; the particles most widely scattered, shall readily obey the summons, and range themselves in close and comely order; and this, not only in one small corner of the earth, as in the *valley of bones*, but over *all* the face of it, which shall be *covered* at once with the many *thousand millions* who inhabited it one generation after another, in a long succession of ages. The *theatre* being about to be *taken down*, and the *actors* having *finished* their several parts, they shall all make their appearance together: *And, O what an assembly will that be!* so vast as not to be survey'd by any other eye but that of the Judge himself, and at present even exceeding our imagination. And why should it be thought a thing *incredible* by any, that *God should raise the dead*? Is it *impossible* or *improper*, beyond his power or inconsistent with his wisdom? neither of these can truly be affirmed. To *almighty* power raising the dead cannot be *impossible*, unless the thing be impossible in *itself*; that is, unless it implies a manifest contradiction: but what more impossible, or indeed, more inconceivable in the *re-production* of the human body, than in its *first production* out of the earth; nay, than in its *continual formation* in the *womb*? The difficulty then does not lie

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lie in answering this question, ^f *How are the dead raised?* being raised no otherwise than they were created, by the infinite power and skill of the great Author of nature: but in this, *With what body do they come?* To which we may reply, with a *little* variation in the *words* of the apostle *Paul*, and *none* at all in his *argument*, *that God giveth them bodies as it pleaseth him, and to every man his own body:* his own most probably, as compos'd of matter that belong'd to the *former* earthly body; since God, whose understanding is infinite, can easily so watch over the constituent particles of each body, and preserve them so distinct, under all the various revolutions and changes of matter, that there shall be sufficient materials remaining out of the old body to form a new one, without borrowing what may be claim'd by any other body. But is there not something highly *improper* and *unworthy* of the *wisdom* of God, in raising this *vile* body, and then *shutting* up the reasonable and immortal *mind* in it, as in a *prison*? no more than it was to ordain its *union* with the body immediately after its *first* creation. From revelation we know this was the original, or primitive state of the soul; nor can we prove its pre-existence from reason; and since this was its *first manner* of existence,

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istence,

^f I Cor. xv. 35.

istence, (I mean *embodied*) and will be its *last*, we have sufficient ground to conclude, that there is somewhat in the nature of a human soul which requires its being cloth'd with matter, in order to its exerting all its powers to the greatest advantage, and enjoying its entire happiness ; i. e. in short, that it may be in its most perfect state. I express myself thus, because I do not imagine the soul is *so dependent* upon the body, as not to be *able* to think and act at all without its assistance. 'Tis past doubt with me, both by evidence from reason and scripture, that the soul does not sleep away all the time betwixt death and the resurrection ; but has the use of its faculties in its separate state, and more free and enlarged too than in this gross terrestrial body ; and is either happy or miserable, according to its prevailing temper and character at the time of its leaving the body. However, still this does not hinder, but the *most perfect* state of the human soul may be that of *union* with a body fitted up for it, and as exactly suited to its nature and operations as it can possibly be ; which we know will be the happy lot of all holy souls at the *resurrection of the just*. To them the resurrection body will not be a *prison*, as the objection supposes ; but a most *delightful habitation* and *useful* medium, or

instrument of action : of which, more afterwards. To this add, that it seems congruous to the reason of our own minds, that spirits which acted by, and under the influence of bodies when they were upon their trial, should likewise be rewarded and punished in bodies, if they can be so *as well* as without them, and much more if *better*. Or, in case this reasoning should not be allowed ; yet I hope 'tis enough to satisfy all who believe the truth of the scriptures, that the thing *will be*, and therefore it must be *best* and *wisest* that it *should* ; and there are very good reasons for it, though they lie, as we can easily apprehend they may, out of our sight.

II. *THE person, to whom this glorious work of raising the dead will be committed, is Jesus Christ, the son of God.* ^e *This is the will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the son, and believeth on him, should have everlasting life ; and I will raise him up in the last day.* To the same effect St. Paul, ^h *Knowing this, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus.* And in the text 'tis asserted, that *all that are in the graves shall hear HIS VOICE*, the voice of the Son of God, and come forth. We may justly say in this case, *Vox non hominem sonat* : 'tis the voice of a God, and not

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of a man. Accordingly, at ver. 25. he calls himself *the Son of God*: *The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.* 'Tis for none but the Son of God, ⁱ *the brightness of his Father's glory*, to issue forth his commands through the dark dominions of the grave, with such power and authority, as shall make even the dead attend to it: as, when he cried with a loud voice at the grave of *Lazarus*; ^k *Lazarus, come forth; he that was dead, came forth immediately.* This was shewing himself the *Son of God, with power.* Afterwards, indeed, and 'tis very remarkable, he varies the expression, ver. 26, 27. *As the father hath life in himself, so has he given to the son to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the SON OF MAN.* So that the same person is both the *Son of God*, and the *son of man*. As the *Son of God*, he has *power* to raise the dead; for it is said, that the *Father* has given the *Son* to have life in himself; as the *son of man*, he has *authority*, or *commission*, actually to raise, and judge them. He exercises this power as *mediator*, the *Word incarnate*; who, consenting to be made in ^l *fashion as a man*, yea, in the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, is therefore highly exalted, and

ⁱ Heb. i. 3. ^k John xi. 43, 44. ^l Phil. ii. 7.

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and has a name given him above every name; is invested with ^m all power, in heaven and earth, as the reward of his having done and suffered all that the *Messiah*, the son of man, was to do, and suffer: and, of this universal authority, he will give a most illustrious proof in the last day, when he shall descend from heaven with his holy angels, and raise the dead out of the chambers of the earth, to receive their final sentence from his mouth. There is a great deal of the wisdom of God seen in this constitution. ⁿ *In Adam all die, in and by Christ shall all be made alive.* ^o The first *Adam* lost immortality by disobedience; the second, by perfect obedience, shall regain it. ^p *Messiah* was cut off, but not for himself; ^q he died the just for the unjust. Being innocent, he was not subject to the law of mortality; he therefore ^r laid down his own life, without being liable to have it taken from him without his consent, that, by making a voluntary sacrifice of his life, he might purchase a right to redeem us from death: and who so fit to bestow immortality, as he who procures it? By this means too the whole transaction becomes more solemn, and conspicuous. Christ is the visible image of the invisible God; the glory in which he appears, and the throne on which

^m Matt. xxviii. 18. ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 22. ^o Rom. v. 19. ^p Dan. ix. 26. ^q 1 Pet. iii. 18. ^r John x. 18.

which he sits, are *visible*; *every eye sees him*, and seeing him, sees how much the Father delighteth to honour the Son, and what a high value he puts on his God-like virtues, and his filial obedience. His true disciples, his *saints*, in whom he comes to be *admired*, behold him with equal reverence and delight. *They also that pierced him*, that would not have him to rule over them, that said, *where is the promise of his coming?* they see him too, but with confusion, and terror. And this brings us to the next general head.

III. THO' *all* are to be raised, yet not all to the *same*, but to *very different states*; *some unto the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation*. 'Tis impossible to *conceive*, much more to *express*, the full import of these terms; yet the scripture has so far let us into the meaning of them, that we are able easily to comprehend, nothing can be more desirable, more joyful, more glorious and triumphant, than the one; nothing more dreadful, and intolerable, than the other. Let us employ a few thoughts about each.

By the *resurrection of life*, we know is meant an entrance upon a *most happy* and *eternal life*: *happy* in respect of the *body*, as well

well as the *soul*; the body having all the perfection which can belong to that, as the soul has all of which its nature and faculties make it capable. And to this perfection, both of the bodily and spiritual part, will correspond the perfection of the *objects*, and the *manner* of enjoyment. [†] *Christ will change this vile body, that it may be fashioned like to his most glorious body.* Let us consider, briefly, wherein this likeness will appear. [‡] *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.* This body is a poor corruptible thing, *crushed before the moth*, as a rotten thing consumeth, even as a garment that is moth-eaten, subject to change and decay; and of such a perishable nature, that, in case it should escape the stroke of external accidents, it must at last become a prey to time, and sink under its own ruins. It is not only *corruptible*, but in part *corrupted* while living; and when dead, quickly turns all to rottenness and corruption. But keep your eye upon it a little while, and you behold it rise *incorruptible*, without the least seeds of death, the least tendency to a decay; no jar, or discord, in the parts which compose it, but perfect harmony; the result of which is perfect soundness and health. The most solid bodies wear away by insensible degrees; and those marble monuments, which are placed

† Philip. iii. 21. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 42.

placed over the dead to preserve their memory, prove, as I may say, false to their trust; have their inscriptions obliterated, and, in the course of time, moulder into dust. Such is the fate of all sublunary things, over which time and death extend their empire; while the bodies of the saints shall be more lasting than *brass*, or *adamant*: not by being harder than they, but by a peculiar privilege of their nature and constitution. *It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory.* The body has its members which are less honourable, and its ^w *uncomely parts*; which, being fitted for present use, will have no place in it when a different state of things shall commence; as is plainly intimated, 1 Cor. vi. 13. No man has reason to be proud of his body, or will be so, if he rightly considers what it is, ^x *σῶμα ταπεινότητος*, a body rather fitted to humble us, than to tempt us to pride. What blemishes, what deformities does it sometimes present us with? how many things are there which do even create a loathing? and what is its beauty, when compar'd with that of the saint's future body? no longer deserving that name. Be it so, since it serves but the more to heighten the value, and increase the glory of our heavenly bodies, which ^y *shall shine*
as

^w 1 Cor. xii. 23. ^x Philip. iii. 21. ^y Matt. xiii.
43.

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as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. A representation of which our blessed Saviour gave us in his ^z *transfiguration on the mount*, when his face was bright as the sun, and his raiment white as the light. Yes, Sirs, the visage of the saints, which, like their master's heretofore, is now often ^a *marred more than other mens*, shall dart forth a surprising lustre; and these bodies, which are treated so ignominiously, be encompassed with glory. The poor *Lazarus*, who, as he ^b *lay at the rich man's gate*, was full of sores, and had scarcely wherewithal to cover his nakedness, a most rueful spectacle, and sad instance of the present low condition of mortality! shall be clothed with robes of light, and appear with ten thousand times more splendor than the rich man could ever pretend to. His will be a glory really residing in him; and thereby widely different from that of haughty *Dives*, which was all borrowed. *It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.* We call some men strong, and so they are, in comparison of others; but what is their strength? how easily overmatch'd, how quickly withered? an impulse of the blood, or the texture and swelling of a muscle, and no more. *Our strength is but labour and sorrow*, apt to waste, and liable to be soon overcome with toil and weariness. And so laborious,

^z Matt. xvii. 2. ^a Isai. lii, 14. ^b Luke xvi. 19.

laborious, and tiresome, is almost every work and employment in this world, that we find it difficult to conceive how the bodily actions of the blessed, in the future state, should be without all trouble and fatigue: but so they shall be. The vigour of the body not being as it is now, the effect of *foreign* recruits, shall be more invincible, when that prophecy of *Isaiab* shall be literally fulfilled; *They that wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.* The thoughts of the mind alone shall exceed the activity of the body; nor shall the mind itself have any cause to complain of the sluggishness of the body, and to wish it more lively and agile than it shall then find it, removing from place to place with an unimaginable swiftness, and perhaps capable of ascending with the same freedom and ease as it now descends. Of this, were it proper here, it might not be difficult to give a *philosophical* account; since the *weight* of our bodies being, in all probability, nothing else but the *effect* of the *Creator's will*, not an absolute, inseparable property; 'tis but to suppose this law of corporeal nature repeal'd, as to the bodies of the just, and their motion will be every whit as natural one way as the other, *upward*

ward as downward. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body; there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. In the original, what we translate *natural body*, is *Σωμα ψυχικόν*, which had been more justly render'd an *animal body*. The body of man, in the present state, is in many respects upon a level with that of other *animals*, not to be supported without the refreshments of meat, and drink, and sleep, and consisting of a great variety of parts, all necessary to the regular discharge of the animal functions. 'Tis a most complicated engine, a wonderful instance of the divine skill, and perfectly well adapted to the condition of the present world, and the life we live in it; but in *itself* less excellent, and therefore to be exchanged for a more *independent* way of existence in another life: where all those appetites, which have their foundation in their subserviency to the preservation of the individual, or the continuation of the species, shall cease for ever: where they ^d *who shall be judged worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage*; the reason of which follows, *neither can they die any more, for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* ^e *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst*

thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 'Tis a sorry life, this of ours, which must go a begging to the several elements, subsist upon the common basket, and is presently extinguished by the stopping of the breath: But the body being animal, the life can be no other. Let us wait for our house from heaven, for that is *Σωμα πνευματικόν*, a *spiritual body*; so stiled, perhaps, because it is to be the immediate workmanship, and special residence of the divine Spirit; or, because, in the manner of its being, it shall resemble spiritual, and even angelical natures, according to the words of our Saviour just quoted; or, which I am apt to think the chief reason, because the soul, or spirit of man, will then be endued with the faculty which it now wants, of guarding and keeping the body *within* as well as *without*, and recruiting its strength and activity as fast as it calls for a supply. Something like this seems to be intended, 1 Cor. xv. 45. *The first man was made unto a living soul*, i. e. his was only an *animal life*, maintain'd after the same manner as that of other animals; *but the last Adam was made unto a quickning spirit*, *εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν*, a *spirit giving life*, i. e. his body, after the resurrection, was a spiritual, not an animal body; depended immediately upon the soul, or spirit within, which kept it alive, and sound,

sound, and undecaying. And, *as we do now bear the image of the earthly Adam* in these animal bodies; so in those spiritual bodies, which we shall have after the resurrection, *we shall bear the image of the heavenly*: our souls, like that of our great Redeemer, will have a quickning, or life-continuing power. It is not necessary that they, who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, should properly die, in order to partake of the heavenly blessedness; but 'tis necessary, that by a change, equivalent to death, their bodies should be raised to a higher perfection, and a nobler kind of life; the consequence of all which will be, that *this mortal shall put on immortality*. Immortality will be as it were *connatural* to those celestial bodies, which it never was to this earthly body, even in innocence: for tho', by the peculiar care of providence, death would have been kept off from innocent man; yet in his earthly body he would not have been qualified for a state of immortality, and must therefore have submitted to a change before he could have pass'd into it. But the glorified body has a kind of life in itself, and is, by its constitution, and the care of the indwelling soul, fenced against the incursions of all destructive accidents; as immortal as the soul, though 'tis probable not so absolutely secure, were it

not united to such a partner. And is it so, that I shall die no more? shall I never more, after the resurrection, have an anxious thought for my body? shall immortality be the privilege of my whole being? O my soul! what should terrify thee, having such a prospect in view? Not a dying body, nor even the sight of a dissolving world! such being the bodies of those who have part in the first resurrection, we may well suppose that every thing else will be answerable; and so indeed it will. It is not enough to say, that *God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and that there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away*; all this is only negative: let us therefore add, that, with a freedom from all evil, there will be an affluence of all good. They shall be in the presence of God, ^f *where there is fulness of joy, and whence flow rivers of pleasure for evermore*: and ^g *of the lamb, who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood; who will feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters, and account their happiness, and their glory, his own.* ^h *They shall drink of the fountain of the water of life freely, and shall inherit all things.* But are all to be thus happy? how much were it to be wish'd! but, alas! it is not

^f Psal. xvi. 11. ^g Rev. i. 5. vii. 17. ^h Rev. xxi, xxii.

not so. Turn your eyes the other way, and how dismal is the prospect ! However, let us not refuse to view it a little, since though it be not an *agreeable*, yet may it be a *useful* contemplation. Some shall be raised *to the resurrection of damnation*. They shall be raised only to be judged, to be condemned, to be ⁱ *punished with everlasting destruction*.

As unwilling as the soul was to depart out of the body at death, it will be much more unwilling to re-enter it ; because now, alas ! it will be fasten'd to the body no otherwise than as a malefactor to the rack. The body, formerly the soul's *tempter* to sin, and instrument in sinning, shall now be the *scene* and *source* of its torment ! O miserable creature ! where may he look, or hope for rest ! cast out from God and heaven ; sentenc'd to *everlasting punishment* ; the body full of pain ; the soul of remorse, anguish, horror, shame, rage, and despair ; whose part ^k *is in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*.

O the inconceivable difference between these two resurrections ! *the resurrection unto life*, and *the resurrection to damnation*. Light and darkness, life and death, or any other the most perfect contraries, are not more opposite. Lord ! of thy great mercy, teach me how I may obtain one of these, and escape

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the other ! Or have I nothing to hope or fear, but only as I happen to be doom'd to one or the other, without being able to influence my future condition by any care or endeavours of my own ? Only consider what follows under the next general head, and you may have full satisfaction.

IV. THE foundation of this *amazing difference*, in the final *states* of men, is an *answerable difference* in their *actions* and behaviour, while they live in this world. So he, who is *truth*, hath told us in the text, *They that have done good, shall come forth to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.* By this then our final state must be decided; our having *done good or evil*; and being ¹ *found doing one or the other, when our Lord cometh.* For, we must consider, that the *resurrection* is in order to *judgment*:
^m *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, those of high and low condition, stand before God; and the books were opened, in allusion to the way of trying criminals in courts of human justice, by written laws; and another book was opened, which is the book of*

¹ Luke xii. 43.

^m Rev. xx. 11---13.

of life (containing the promise of eternal life, with the names of those registered, who have a title to it by the conditions of the gospel covenant) and the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell, (rather the grave, Hades) delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. You see their being judged according to their works, is twice repeated within the compass of two verses: and indeed how else should men be judged, but according to their works or actions, external or internal, good or bad? These only are in their power, and therefore for these only shall they be judged: for we know that ° *God will judge the world in righteousness*; which must suppose, that the prevailing conformity or disconformity of every man's actions to the rule which God has given him, will be the subject of enquiry in the last day, and the immediate ground or reason of his absolution or condemnation. This is the constant way of representing this matter in scripture; ° *Well done, good and faithful servant! Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.* ° *When the day of the revelation of the righteous*

° Acts xvii. 31.

° Matt. xxv. 21, 30.

° Rom. ii. 5.

judgment of God shall come, he will render to every man according to his deeds : to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil ; but glory, honour and peace to every man that doth good : for there is no respect of persons with God ; intimating that there would be, if in absolving one, and condemning another, he had respect to something *else*, and not to their improvement or non-improvement, their use or abuse of the faculties and opportunities they enjoy'd. ¹ *We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.* In the same strain do all the other places speak, which treat of the recompences of the last day. No man shall be punished hereafter for the sin of his *first* parents, this not having been among those things *which he did in his body*, but done long before he had a being : nor on the other hand (notwithstanding the necessity and efficacy of our Saviour's mediation) shall any man be rewarded *merely* for the *righteousness of Christ*, without any of his *own* ; nor for his

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his *faith*, though it should rise unto assurance, *unaccompanied with works*. Not that works truly good (with regard to those who have the knowledge of the gospel) can be without faith in Christ, from which they are to flow. Accordingly it must be supposed of the persons intended by our Saviour, that they *believe*; and then 'tis evident that this is not all, they *obey* as well as *believe* the gospel. This must be their *title to*, and their *qualification for* the happiness of the heavenly state. The promise of *eternal* life, upon the condition of sincere, though imperfect obedience, together with the powerful *aids* of the holy Spirit, we owe to the *free*, the *infinite* mercy of God in *Jesus Christ*, as our *sacrifice* and *intercessor*; but our *immediate title* to the promise can be no other, than our *fulfilling* that *sincere* obedience to the commands of the gospel, to which the promise is made. And 'tis no less evident, that the same is our *only qualification* for the promised reward. When the *good* man goes to *heaven*, and the *wicked* man to *hell*, each of them goes to *his own place*; the place he is prepared and adapted to by the temper and qualities of his mind, resulting from the general course of his actions. There can be

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no *happiness* for a reasonable creature, as man is, without *self-enjoyment*; and no *self-enjoyment*, without the practice of *universal goodness*: for how can that person enjoy, *i. e.* take pleasure in conversing with himself, who is conscious to his not being what he ought to be, and not acting as he ought to act? But self-enjoyment is not all; that we may be happy, 'tis likewise necessary, being *indigent* creatures, that we have the enjoyment of some good *without* us, suitable to the nature, and adequate to the capacities of our immortal souls. The *chief good* of man is *God*; but how shall man enjoy *God*, unless he *delights* in him? or how *delight* in him, without *resembling* him in that *holiness* which is the glory of the divine nature, and the perfection of the human? From all which, the decree, that *'without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, appears to be no arbitrary constitution; but founded in the unchangeable nature of *God*, and for that reason never to be dispensed with, or altered.

THE time will not allow my being so large in the application as the subject will bear, and seems to demand; however, some use I would make of it. And,

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† Heb. xii. 14.

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I. THE consideration of what our blessed Saviour here saith, that *they who have done good shall hear his voice, and come forth to the resurrection of life*, is alike fitted to afford both *instruction* and *comfort* to persons of *sincere* piety, who love Christ, and keep his commandments. Whatever sufferings they may be called to undergo in these earthly bodies, they have abundant reason to bear them with a humble patience, and chearful resignation, in hope of that happy change which the bodies of the just will pass under at the resurrection. *In this tabernacle do they groan, being burdened with the infirmities, sicknesses and pains of their mortal part?* let them say to themselves; “ Well, ’tis but while I am in this body
“ that I shall have occasion for any of these
“ complaints; out of the body I shall know
“ nothing of them; and the body my soul
“ dwells in next, will be of a quite different
“ structure and composition, so as to make
“ me ample amends for all the inconveni-
“ cies of the present state.” It was this principle inspired the apostle *Paul*, and his fellow christians, with so much magnanimity under all their pressures and persecutions: *‘We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always*

always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body; knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you: for which cause we faint not; but tho' our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day: for our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal. By the same doctrine of a future glorious resurrection, they are farther taught after what manner they should entertain the thoughts of death. Death is the dissolution of this earthly body; and is there any thing in that so very terrible to those who look for a heavenly one? Were there nothing else to reconcile me to my departure out of the body, this should do it, that "when absent from the body, I am present with the Lord; which every good man must think to be far better than to be at home in the body, and absent from the Lord, as ^w St. Paul did. But there is this additional consideration; that as our souls shall not be found altogether

^u 2 Cor. v. 8.^w Phil. i. 23.

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ther *naked*, but be receiv'd into mansions of bliss; so when the time for the resurrection of our bodies is come, our souls shall be adorned with what, 'till then, might seem to be wanting to them, and so have their happiness compleat. Can I not meditate on the day of my death, without having my soul put into the greatest hurry and disorder; when by faith I am assured a day will come that the grave must surrender up its spoils, and * *death itself, the last enemy, shall be destroyed*? Am I mourning for the loss of dear relatives departed, with whom, while they lived, my soul was united in the bonds of *religious*, as well as *natural* affection? and is it not an obvious reflection, they have only left our world for a better; their souls are safe, and happy with God; and their bodies, which we deposit in the dust, are only *sown* against the great *harvest* of the world, and committed to the earth as a trust, which will be required of it again? No sooner has death fitted me for their society, but I hope my soul will mingle embraces with theirs; and, after the interval of some time (which to happy spirits will not appear long) our bodies too will join hands, and so shall *we ever be with them, and with the Lord*: which is a very good

* 1 Cor. xv. 26.

† 1 Theff. iv. 17, 18.

good reason why we should comfort ourselves, and one another, with these words.

2. MUST they who have done evil come forth to the resurrection of damnation? how should this thought awaken all such as are going on in an evil course, to a sense of their danger, and make them immediately resolve upon a change of life? for, alas! if they do it not immediately, they may have no opportunity for doing it at all; and if they die as they have hitherto liv'd, their pleasures and their hopes will die with them. And though their bodies will revive again, yet these will not; nor shall they get any thing by the resurrection of their bodies but an encrease of their misery and torment. Wherefore let me beseech them to compassionate their own case, and not run the dreadful hazard of everlasting damnation; as they do every hour, nay, every moment, they delay their return to God and their duty. Let them break off their sins by repentance; and with a humble faith in Christ, and reliance upon his merits and intercession, join sincere and persevering obedience to all his commands; that having made him their friend who is to be their judge, they may be able to say, come, Lord Jesus; and not be ashamed, or afraid before him at his coming.

3. SINCE

3. SINCE *all who are in the graves shall bear the voice of the Son of God*, and all rise to happiness or misery, according as they have done good or evil; it concerns all *frequently and seriously to meditate on these things, and to govern their lives and actions by them.* There cannot be a more necessary, or a more useful meditation than that of death, for dying creatures, as we are, to teach us how to live. I confess, were death the utter extinction of our being, and did it for ever deprive us of all sense and thought, we should do wisely enough to banish the thoughts of it out of our minds; or when they intruded, to make some such use of them as that mentioned by the apostle *Paul*,² *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die:* but we know, that as^a *it is appointed for all men once to die*, so, *after death*, to come to judgment: and since we must be judg'd as well as die, and in order to be judg'd, have our bodies *raised* again from the grave, that we may receive our recompence of reward or punishment in them; what can lie plainer before us than both our duty and our happiness do in this case? *viz.* to have our minds so powerfully impress'd by such meditations, as to make the whole of this life a preparation for the next. But surely the
young

² 1 Cor. xv. 32.

^a Heb. ix. 27.

young may be excus'd from such thoughts ; the meditations of death must be unseasonable for them : No, they would not, even though youth would privilege from the arms of death, since it would not be *ingenuous* and *grateful* to forget our *Creator*, when we had most reason to remember him ; nor *safe* to contract those ill habits in our youthful years, which it would be exceeding difficult to unlearn again in our more advanced age : much less then can it be improper for young persons to exercise themselves in such meditations, and in the practice of piety, to which they lead, when, young as they are, they may die ; and when they see others continually dropping into the grave, who seem'd to have as little reason to apprehend the approach of death as they can have. If I am not too young to *die*, and to be *judg'd*, I am not too young to *think* of death, and to *prepare* for it. ^b *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes ; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* You will all acknowledge it to be your wisest course to *fear God, and keep his commandments*, in respect of the next life :
let

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let me add, and of *this too* ; for the peace, the happiness, the security of which you make the most effectual provision, by securing the favour and blessing of that God, who has the disposal of you, and every thing that concerns you, in his hands. If *you seek him, he will be found of you* ; will be the guide and guardian of your days ; your best friend in prosperity and adversity ; your refuge, your support, your glory, and your *exceeding great reward*.

§ I. Chron. xxviii. 9.



TEXTS

Sanctus. Deus of a living God.
let me not, and of this; for the power;
the highest, the faculty of which you
make the most effectual providing, by so-
lving his power and blessing on the God,
who has the object of you, and every
thing that concerns you, in his hands. It
is not for you to be afraid of you; will
be the guide and the light of your days;
your best friend, your best advocate;
your glory, and your glory, and



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